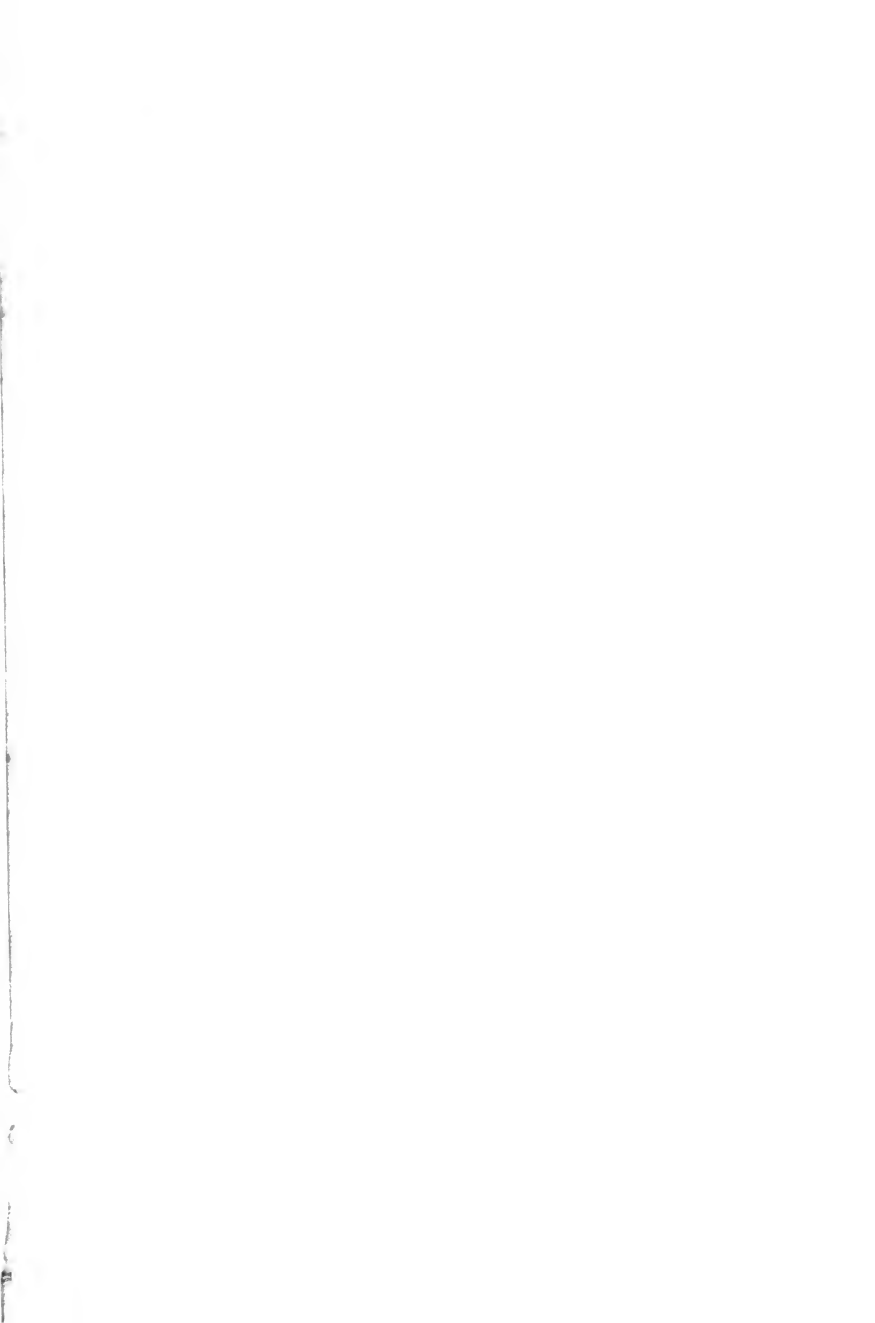


Sum Caroli Whibley

18 July 8
per








To
Charles Whaley,
With the writer's best wishes.

April: 1907.



HUMAN AFFAIRS.

By the same writer:

PROSE

THE GREEN WINDOW.

A DISSERTATION UPON SECOND FIDDLES.

BEN JONSON

(for the edition of "Volpone" with pictures
by Aubrey Beardsley).

EDGAR ALLAN POE

(for the edition of "The Raven" with pictures
by Horton).

VERSE

POEMS.

THE HOUSES OF SIN.

HUMAN AFFAIRS

BY

VINCENT O'SULLIVAN.

LONDON

DAVID NUTT

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THE GREAT MOMENT



THE GREAT MOMENT

I

WHEN Mr. Becker died, his widow found herself with her two daughters in a distressing situation. It was as if the Fortune which had carried Mr. Becker so far had been peculiar to himself, impossible to bequeath, however much he might desire it—departing, this Fortune or Demon of his, finally from the world in company with his soul. The big New York house in Thirty-fourth Street near Fifth Avenue had to go, with all its appurtenances of servants, and horses, and carriages, and, as her daughters more than poor Mrs. Becker herself ultimately noticed, most of what it stood for in the way of social ease and importance. The big house, in fact, ere many months had passed saw their faces no more, Mrs. Becker having made up her mind at length to the inevitable boarding-house in West 56th. Street, where, secured from absolute want by some relics picked from the wreck, she tried to enliven her stunned wits, and to use herself to her new and narrow and immensely dreary and ugly existence.

It was the dreariness and ugliness, most of all, that stayed with Maud upon her frequent escapes from the

boarding-house for a tramp in the near Central Park. Nita, constitutionally fragile, with the melancholy and resignation to Fate expressed in the eyes and voices of so many Americans, was content to sit at home—or rather in the refuge—with her mother, where they intoned for hours together the lamentations of exile; but Maud rebelled against the boarding-house, she hated the attitude of having seen better days, she was not content to sit down in the boarding-house and feel all its subtle powers of depression working their will on her. She loathed the boarding-house to the point that an escape from it into the freedom of the streets had positively the effect of an escape from a gaol or asylum. As she strode through Upper-Broadway in the evening, she had floating before her under the electric-light images of her little bedroom with its jarring wall-paper and flaring jet of gas; of the general parlour, with its ornaments which set her teeth on edge, with its vivid suggestion of discomfort, with the assurance it managed to convey that no human beings had ever spent their evenings in that room save such as had resigned themselves to accept discomfort for their portion. After she had passed a few hours in that room, Maud understood why so many of her country-folk regarded the dubious boarding-houses of Bloomsbury, and the deplorable *pensions* and *meublés* at Passy and in the neighbourhood of the Étoile, where economical summer vacations bestowed them, as so many ante-rooms of Heaven. The very unattractiveness of the

boarding-house prevented Maud from being impartial about its denizens and customs: walking in that direction through Broadway she saw in spirit the evening meal, the "supper", with the fatigued table-cloth, the chipped china, the long-service knives and forks and spoons; and it was always with a start of revolt that she recalled the company who partook of this meal with her—really, as some would think (though perhaps this depended a little on being aware that the contact was but momentary), interesting enough: men and women either too grimy, or over-smart, talking always, so far as the men went, with apparent languor covering real earnestness of immense public affairs and occurrences, never by any chance of the plain ordinary businesses which unquestionably were the genuine concern of their lives. She saw them trail out indiscriminately when they had done with eating, to take up stations in the parlour; she heard the fatal piano begin; she saw sometimes the younger and more spirited depart in twos or threes for a theatre, or perhaps simply for "ice-cream"; then, lying upstairs on her bed she heard continuously, for hours as it seemed, the hum of voices penetrating the intervening ceilings to where she lay,—or worse than that, in summer nights coming through the open window from the "stoop" where the boarders congregated;—voices still interminably discussing the great public affairs of the world.

However, it must be conceded that if the boarding-

house acted on Maud, Maud very sensibly reacted on the boarding-house. It was not that she stood off, had any *morgue*, shewed herself openly contemptuous: far from that! She did her best, poor thing, to come into the picture; she discussed the German Emperor with various enterprizing gentlemen who sat down beside her till her head swam and the potentate had scarcely, as they say, a thread left to his back. But she was persistently out of drawing; her very presence was against her. When you looked at Maud you thought of some Diana, some huntress-goddess, holding loosely a bow and arrow, rambling through sylvan glades nude, with flowing hair, and in her free strides shaking off the dew from the grass upon her polished feet. The unhumbled carriage of her handsome head, her tall, gracious, sweeping movements, seemed somehow or other too large for the place; when she was in the parlour or on the stairs it was she who was there and nobody else. She was in no wise congruous to a West 56th. Street boarding-house; she was an accident. When she entered the dining-room it had very definitely upon the slightly disconcerted boarders the effect of a presentation. She really made the boarders self-conscious; even the most imperturbable pulled his cuffs, or freshened up her frock, with an exacter eye to decorum. To see them, they might have been in the presence of one of those great ones of the earth whose actions as recorded in the newspapers they discussed so freely.

The young clerks, for instance, strange callow mixtures of simplicity and preternatural shrewdness, who were the indeterminate comedians of the joyless company, referred to her an uneasy look when they ventured a little joke. In fact the only difference was that Maud didn't happen to be recorded in the newspapers; but for the rest she was as effective and salient, as felt, in a word, at the boarding-house *table d'hôte* as might have been a Cardinal-Archbishop in full archiepiscopal robes.

It was chiefly this aspect of the whole unfortunate situation which struck the young gentlemen who for love of their princess had loyally followed her into exile. They presented themselves, the young gentlemen, one or another, almost daily at the boarding-house; they arranged to eat a meal there; they glared—oh yes, it was quite that—at the indigenes, who to be, poor mortals! as they thought, in key, hazarded uncomfortable remarks to Maud about crowned heads, and actors, and millionaires, as though they had taken a liberty. But even to the boarders, lost as they were in visions of royal alliances, and high nuptials contracted between American millionairesses and the peerage of Great Britain and Ireland, it was apparent that all these rich young gentlemen were dying to marry Miss Becker; and in truth, with that bland indifference to dowry on the female side which is found in America and almost nowhere else, any one of them would have jumped at the

chance if Maud had said the word. Maud herself not seldom thought that she would say the word; she saw in that a deliverance from a state of being which was wearing out her mother, and which in herself gave rise to a mental sickness and abhorrence worse a thousand times than any physical ill; but when she considered her suitors, she was put to it to say to whom. Looking at these young lawyers and financiers, sons and grandsons of lawyers and financiers, all superficially of course different, and yet in essentials astonishingly alike, with their shorn faces, blunt noses, straight hair falling on each side of a straight narrow forehead, and the cheek-bones standing forth high and prominent, as though after but a few generations the climate was actually shaping them to the image of aboriginal Mohawk or Sioux, Maud sometimes thought, helplessly enough, that she might as well close her eyes and stretch out her hand above their written names with a steady resolution to accept his it might chance to fall on. The one among them who stood distinctly out, the individual of the group, the one she felt in her heart it would be good and interesting to live with, was Paul Grayson; and he alas! was almost as poor as herself. To be sure it was a different kind of poverty; it allowed him to belong to one or two clubs and to dress fairly well; but all the same to wed Paul meant choosing the stony, dismal, stuffy lane, when there, right in front of her if she would step into it, was the grand wide breezy

high-road rolling its levelled leagues before and before her to the end of time.

Yet in the end it was Paul Grayson that she married. This inconsistent measure, whereat the prudent and far-sighted must cast up their hands as at a piece of wild folly, was not however so headlong as it appeared. Maud would not have married Paul—no, certainly never—if she had thought that by this marriage she was dooming herself in perpetuity to an existence of sordid stagnation: that, at least, was not in her nature. But she was sure she knew Paul; she believed him capable of stupendous doings; she had no doubt he could do anything he chose. And she believed he would choose for her to do the big things. On the very afternoon she became engaged, as the wet November day was drearily waning, standing on the corner of Seventh Avenue and the street amid the jar and clang of “cable-cars,” she said to him:

“You know it has to be that, for all reasons. But we must be simply rolling. I will give you five years”.

“I will do it in less”, said Paul Grayson.

II

At the outset, however, it was apparent that it would require the hopefulest eyes of youth to enray with their foreshortening glances those five years lying ahead, to experienced gazers, so long and brown. In the first place, a change from the boarding-house

in Fifty-sixth Street to a lodging which found itself, somewhat to its surprise, developing into a flat, in West Twenty-second Street, could hardly be called a change for the better. Indeed, it was sometimes a question, as Maud in moments of discouragement reflected, whether it were not positively a change for the worse. The chimneys of the boarding-house at all events did not smoke; up there she was not faced by gaps in the larder; she did not lie down and rise up with projects to reduce coffee and sugar to impossible attenuations. At the boarding-house, after all, the people who provided you with what you ate were as much in the background as they were in the old days, in her father's time. Besides, up there the friends of the old days, women friends and girl friends, were attentive, and sympathetic, and constant, taking her about, keeping her in touch, as it were, with a world she had not wholly abandoned. But after about a year of West Twenty-second Street (the birth of her baby, Maud used to think, might be taken definitely as a point of departure), the appearances of these friends were so rare that they became events. It was not at all that they dropped her, that, as those strange boarders in Fifty-sixth Street would say, they "gave her the shake", or to borrow even more happily from that wealthy vernacular, that they "turned her down"; it was rather that she and they failed in similar interests, in points of contact,—the friends of her youth, as Mrs. Grayson pleasantly enough called them,

shewing themselves quite unable by sympathy or imagination to see, so to speak, where Mrs. Grayson was now. They could no more realize, bright-plumaged, gay, beautiful creatures, that Maud had to wonder pretty often whether the butcher would be paid at the end of the week, and whether she could afford a few extra cents for better milk, than Maud herself, after a while, could get up a satisfactory excitement over relations of dinner-parties and dances to which she never went. They ended, it must be confessed, by awkward silences, during which they watched with a kind of fascinated terror great Saharas roll out amid the conversation to apprise them that they were lamentably boring one another. And within eighteen months after her marriage Maud did not know whether to rejoice or to resent that they had given her up altogether.

Still, if we would be quite fair to these not unamiable friends, it must be freely admitted that poor dear Maud and her surroundings were dreadfully depressing. It seems to be a melancholy truth that all troubles which are borne with resignation are depressing for the beholders. That is why many people find the lives of the saints so depressing. That is why the contemplation of Napoleon at St. Helena, for instance, is not depressing, because he was in a constant state of revolt against his imprisonment. In the present case, what was apparent to Maud's friends was that Paul was always "down town"; one saw the

baby even when it was not present, and that all Maud's thoughts and managements were addressed to the baby; one saw, what is more, that another baby threatened. Every corner, the very look of the tablecloth, had the odour, if not of actual want, certainly of *gêne*. Outside, the dull smelly street, half-stagnant or unpleasantly noisy, with the "ash-barrels" infecting the air, was as unlovely as anything inside. Life there had not the advantage of being mournful; it was simply flat, and sordid, and unkempt, with the peculiar degradation which attends all over the world poverty making grimaces—by far of all miseries the most harrowing. One of her father's friends, who possessed his classics, returning home after a visit to her sorrowfully by night, recalled the Sophoclean—"Thou hast rushed forward to the utmost verge of daring; and against that throne where Justice sits on high thou hast fallen, my daughter, with a grievous fall". And the worst of it appeared to be that it was all gradually taking the bloom off Maud; that it was to an unparalleled extent stupefying her; almost (it might without misuse of terms be said, poor lady!) with subtle, insidious action demoralizing her. She became strangely neglectful of her apparel,—not by any means slattern, but rather conveying that she had laid aside deliberately and in discouragement niceties and blandishments: she, with all her magnificent health and strength, was going off, as the expression is, in her looks. You felt somehow that

she had been brought down by the hardships of her case to a gross materialism; looking at her, and talking to her you could not but perceive that her mind was occupied day in day out with abject concerns, to the exclusion of all the delicate and urbane refinements of wifehood and maternity. You were conscious of her, ill-fated woman! now clinging to a strap in shamefully overcrowded, overheated, "elevated" trains; now bargaining, even wrangling, in sordid tenth-rate shops with brutal Americanized-German grocers and bakers;—spending herself upon the most menial household cares, doing everything in fact she was born not to do, with the courage, or at all events with the resignation, it might be said, of a martyr, if she had not been beyond the point of being conscious there was anything to be courageous or resigned about, or anything at all to regret. These were the onlooker's observations, and what struck him mainly was that a creature framed for the finest social uses should be so wasted; though the courage and resignation, as elements in the situation worthy of tribute, were of course, even for the obtuse,—even, perhaps, since they would be likely to see just those, particularly for them—always prominently there. And all the time, the second baby, as we have said, threatened,—coming into the world at last, poor little wretch! on a grey Christmas-eve, when a gale of wind carrying flakes of snow was pouring through the long avenues, and Paul was as usual toiling and contriving "down town".

III

With that consummation, the courage and resignation, at any rate, if they were ever consciously exercised, gained, it is clear, wider opportunities; and it must be clearer still that when in the fourth year a third baby uttered its thin wail, the alarums calling forth those guards were almost innumerable. If they were ever consciously summoned to exercise, those guards! —that obviously is the question; and there is no harm in believing they were not. There was a fundamental nobility in Maud which all the crass and unclean things could not stifle, and which asserted itself just as in a field used as a dumping ground poor patches of verdure appear here and there through the garbage and shot rubbish. And this nobility which, if you like, might of course in happier circumstances have been put down merely to insensitiveness, was at variance with conscious virtue. The few intervals she had of introspection never amounted to much more than warnings to avoid herself. Self-pity, she fully agreed at such times, was the worst form of cowardice: if you ever allow yourself to go in for self-pity, she reflected, you don't know where you'll come out. Precisely that conviction, together with a certain lack of that fastidiousness as to what is presented to one's ears and sight which for some makes it in all ways vital to escape, as out of some deathly plague-stricken inn, from what is ugly, or

saddening, or ignoble—that exquisite, perhaps morbid fastidiousness which, as one fancies, opens possibilities for the mean, or coarse, or injurious man to give just as keen pain as an unclean place, a garish decoration, a new street, a squalid room, or simply a vulgar book or stage-play—yes, precisely that conviction, and what in her case may certainly be termed a fortunate inapprehension of all the rest, were what kept her from taking her present state as accidental, from regarding herself as what is called a victim of Fate, from thinking that she should, or that she could be anywhere else in the social scheme than where she was.

And where she was, Mrs. Grayson sometimes felt to be more than anything else lonely. Her mother had died in these years; Nita had gone West as a teacher of music; Paul was everlastingly “down town”, going there among the harsh office-buildings even on Sundays. Maud in the midst of the great city so full of brightness and rumour and an odd kind of charm, looked around her with the same detachment, the same sense of having nothing to do with it, as if she had been standing alone on a platform watching the relentless waters roll tremendously over some Niagara. All the life of high luxury and opulence, in which New York is so expert,—nay, the very standpoint wherefrom to appreciate it, drifted away from her, she found, day by day more than ever. She was outside of all that, really and truly outside: she regarded the

glittering flow of Fifth Avenue on a winter afternoon with as much inadaptness, as much exteriority, as much with the feeling that here was an exhilarating panorama spread before her whereof she did not understand the workings and with which she had no concern, as a nigger washerwoman carrying her clothes-basket might regard it. In the sweltering summer days she saw the houses close one by one, and was vaguely reminded that the owners had flown in their brave plumage to Newport, to Bar-Harbour, or were filling the hotels at cool and mountainous European places; but it did not occur to her to envy their luck. She only thought that she herself was lucky when with her husband and the children on a Sunday morning, she (poor tired woman!) could escape from the stifling town on board some cheap, overcrowded "excursion-boat", and with the sounds of a merciless band dinning her ears which she was to carry in her head for three or four days after, go down the bay to some dreadful vulgar Coney-Island, a very hell of noise, and glare, and horror, yet scarcely perceived as such, or as anything except as a heavenly change from the everlasting Twenty-second Street.

IV

On a close and oppressive evening in late spring, it was just one of those little gay airs, heard in some such conditions a day or two before, which, jigging and

wheeling interminably through her head, tortured her to distraction. The pretty, mirthful, soulless little tune was so out of harmony with the troubled spirit! The doctor had been gone about an hour, after having defined the sickness of the oldest child, a girl, to be the scarlet fever. The child had been overcome on one of those strident "excursion-boats", returning to the city in the evening, and had been carried home by her father, resting her tired flushed head trustfully on his shoulder, through the dim sabbath streets. Ere he departed, the physician, whom Maud knew to be crafty and compassionate, had done his duty in warning her of the danger to which the other children became liable, if they were not presently removed to some salutary place; and Maud, now that her small patient had a restful moment, sat thinking of all this, wondering how to contrive, her mind sagged with anxiety about the present and future. Where were the other children to go to? Who was to take them? To whom in her friendlessness could she turn? Ah, if Paul would only come home! And she revolted at last against that brutal "down-town" which held relentlessly the fiercely struggling man, strangling in him all joy and the pleasant views of young manhood. It was not he who ever spoke to her, she did not need to remind herself, of his struggles there; of late months, indeed, he had scarcely spoken of anything. She perceived to-night, glancing at the clock, that he was later in his home-coming than usual; but

hardly had she taken note of it than the door opened and revealed the expected, weary face.

Maud looked up with a haggard smile of welcome: the evening, she knew, had its bitter things in store, but she craved for him, and even for herself, an hour's respite. She took the kettle, as she had so often done, to make his coffee. As she stooped he drew near and kissed her, and she noticed a strangeness in his look.

"Well, Maud", he said with a nervous tremble in his voice which betrayed he was over-wrought; "I have done it."

"Yes dear?" she asked incuriously. She looked round the room to see where she had laid his slippers.

Paul sat down, put his hands in his pockets, and stretched out his legs. "I guess," he said with a dry little laugh, "that we may call it rolling."

At this Maud looked up with a quickened interest; the phrase had taken her back years and years,—actually, as it seemed, to indefinite and forgotten epochs. She saw that Paul, the strong, silent, determined man, was so much moved that his lips were shaking; and what came to her first out of the situation was, curiously enough, a pang of fright, even of terror.

"I've been partner in Ballard's for over a year," Paul went on in his quiet undemonstrative voice. "I was long in cotton four days ago on a panicky market". He paused as if reviewing it all again, and then added with deliberation: "We're really pretty rich".

Maud gave him his slippers, and then sat down and stared at him as he unlaced his boots. She knew Paul well enough to understand that when he went the length of saying "pretty rich", he meant that so far as human eyes could foresee there would be no more squalid misery, no more sordid rows with tradesmen, no more tenth-rate provisions and cheese-paring and general bedragglements, no more, in a word, of all that Twenty-second Street stood for; that on the contrary a life large and wide, opulent, moving with blessed easiness to charming issues, was presently imminent. With her clever intuitiveness it took her but a few seconds after Paul had spoken to recognize that this was the great moment of his life, and duly, in consequence, to bring herself to an attitude of sufficient importance: this, in truth, was where his early wrinkles, his hard thin face, the white threads prematurely seaming his hair, had brought him out. But during the minute which characteristically he gave her to herself, what came to her with astonishing vividness, with such a strength of conviction that she could not possibly have any doubt about it, was that it was in no wise concurrently her own great moment; that, somewhat to her dismay, she was not responding to the exhilaration of the moment in the least. Her own great moment, she seemed all hurriedly and freshly to be telling herself, lay rather behind and behind there, years ago, when she stood on a corner of Seventh Avenue, under a drizzling November sky.

amid the clash of "cable-cars". It made, she was finding, a greater moment for her to believe, than to find her beliefs justified. And within that long-past gesture, she saw now that, all unbeknown to her at the time, she had comprehended the fruition of every one of the great things she was stipulating for; resembling very really the gamester who hardly glances at the heaped winnings he has risked his last obol to gain, since he esteems himself fully paid by the grand excitement of the hazard. Her life's single adventure, which had, as a sort of alleviating geniality, some of the features and daring of an escapade, having been accomplished—yes, and lived through in imagination with such intensity that its alternatives had been practically condensed and exhausted, then and there, without, in truth, as this wonderful hour had proved, due open-eyed recognition of all its important bearings, but all the same with a certain sub-conscious attention to its signifiacnce thereafter guiding her acts—Maud had taken up uncomplainingly the bitter variety of life that offered, as being without question the one possible life for her; and now she felt portentously that with all its squalor, all its hideousness and dreariness, any other kind of life than just that was nothing less than impossible. She had taken the mould, and she stuck almost sensibly to the moulding. A change at this date would come near to killing her. So, in face of these surprising gorgeous conditions suddenly outspread, as to which

she had so long ago given up expectation that she was not sure she had ever expected them, there was no need of anything so difficult as renunciation: she simply, if the term be not too harsh, refused. She could not, simply, take up again that easy, bland, pleasant existence, with its richness, its colour, its refinements, its boredoms too and insincerities: she knew now, though she had been all unaware of it half an hour ago, that she had come to want only to keep her rooms tidy, to wash and dress the children, to guard them in sickness, to look after Paul's clothes, and then, after all that—ah yes, if God willed—a good long sleep!

Paul, meanwhile, not looking at her, apparently still busy with his boots, was more and more conscious of her silence, of the delay in the coming of the expected outburst of delight, the *élan*, which he had over and over pictured to himself for encouragement through anxious nights and days. His nerves, strung just now to the finest perceptions, gave him a warning, which he took with a slight shudder and a horrible inward contraction, that she who was the very essence of the great moment, without whose participation and joy in it the great moment would be but middling and only half-true, was with all the goodwill in the world unaccountably powerless to "play up" to it, as the actors say, or even to come inside it, far less to move about in it delightfully and easily. Some victories, thought poor victorious Paul, are more terrible

than any defeats. He was like to a chief citizen who organizes a festival to celebrate the triumph of a young queen, and when, all being ready, he enters the queen's room with garlands, he finds her enchanted, unable to stir. In his anxiety, his desperation, as it might well be called, he flung off those habits of reserve, of quite lover-like shyness, which still quaintly governed his intercourse with Maud, and going over to her he put his arm round her shoulders.

"Listen", he said. "It's the big house, it's lots of servants, it's the steam-yacht, it's anything in the wide world you please. It is not what I please, you will know that, it's what you please.—I thought I was in time", he added humbly; "we are still six months off from the five years you gave me. Say that I am in time, my dearest dear love, or I think it will break my heart. I have done it all—I mean, I have only thought of you."

Well, she tried; she did her best to desire, with a satisfactory shew of sincerity, all those dazzling things at her feet: pondering them she looked down on her spoiled neglected hands. And then, at last, thinking only of her love of Paul, and her pride in him, and how she would rather die than wound and disappoint him, she looked up into his face and smiled. But even as she smiled the great tears welled into her eyes: impatient to get rid of them she shook her head. And it was this sad negative shake, rather than the smiling, which in the end remained with Paul.

THE ENTAIL.

THE ENTAIL

I

THE family of T. Rembrandt Codd always gave you the impression of being on the look-out for a social position in London. They had, to be sure, already a position, in fact a very definite position, resting on South Kensington, which Brompton, Hammersmith, and other districts assisted to bolster; but still what mainly occurred to you when you were invited to share their meal or drink their tea was that they were striving socially at a move up. Mamma, Papa, and the three girls, nay, even T. Rembrandt himself till he fell in with the Great Genius,—they all abounded in precise anecdote of the class just above them. They must always have been like that, from the time the founder of their fortunes had nailed down carpets in people's houses, till he became what he was now, the chief partner in a flourishing "carpet-emporium" in the Tottenham Court Road. If they had been asked to dine with the Prince of Wales, they would have come home talking about the King.

T. Rembrandt, I have said—Tommy Codd himself shared these amiable weaknesses of a not ignoble ambition till he was about twenty years old. He went

up to Merton, but he got diphtheria before he had been two terms at the University, and after that his mother refused to allow her only son again to affront the Schools. Henceforward he led a dawdling life, taking himself, and taken by his family, for an invalid. Here it is important to remark that his family, his mother and sisters, at all events, were the kind of people that we authors regard with a feeling which is nothing less than love: they, were members of that large prosperous middle class who do actually buy books. It is, I suppose, pretty generally accepted that the aristocracy in England, save those who are scholars and interested in genuine literature, neither buy books nor read them; the artists borrow them; while the multitude depend on the circulating library, or read the newspapers. There remain, thank God! a solid phalanx who don't understand much more about the books they read than about the pictures they buy or the music they hear, and yet would be thought cultivated; and to that end are willing enough to spend of their numberless shillings not only upon the volumes of the popular writers they really comprehend and delight in, but also upon works odd or esoteric which they honourably plough through without grasping one sentence in ten. And one of these last is in fact the kind of book they prefer; for they feel, justly enough, that they have five shillings' worth, or whatever the price is, of superiority over those who have not read it. Well, as I was

saying, of this solid and amiable phalanx the family of T. Rembrandt Codd were no unworthy members; and in such benignant surroundings, is it surprising that our Thomas, being somewhat fanciful after his illness, and having nothing whatever to do but wander vaguely about wool-gathering, should presently give himself to the elaboration of sonnets and lyrics of hopeless passion? And of course the more he composed, the more he read in other authors to get the pitch, as it were, and also to get a start; the native impulse not being sufficiently strong to set him a-rhyming and a-prosing without some outside push. In this way he came, as might be expected, on the works of the Great Genius, and possessed himself of them thoroughly. The Great Genius had no more fervent disciple. In fact, T. Rembrandt got so wrought up, that nothing would do for him but he must meet and talk to the Great Genius in London or elsewhere.

That he brought this about without much difficulty the reader will easily believe. What, however, must put a more stringent tax upon the average credulity is the statement that Mr. Codd did not merely make the acquaintance of the Great Genius and end there: on the contrary, he became intimate with the Great Genius, and was constantly to be seen in his company. The truth is, Tommy had a fund of coarse spirits and repartee inherited from an immediate ancestor who had found these qualities of use in the days when he was travelling from town to town with specimens of

carpets which it was his interest to force on recalcitrant buyers. These spirits, directed and refined by the Great Genius, as only he knew how to do it, ended by becoming, quite artificially of course, but nevertheless very really, engaging and charming. Add to this, that the Great Genius, splendid creature as he was, had his share of our common infirmities: he liked, for instance, the apposite chorus, the not too intelligent listener; he liked to embroider upon subjects of which his fundamental knowledge was shaky; he liked, as he was getting old, to sentimentalize about himself and his emotions, to put himself in review-order, to put, say, his earlier amatory prowesses on parade; and there was our Tommy in the reviewing stand, a tributary prince of a weak and dependent, an almost negligible state, widely admiring, missing not an antic, applauding with the sure tact which interest and awe and reverence inspire, just at the right moment. The Great Genius was an abundant talker, and it was his wont in his country-house in the winter evenings, or in strolls through the fields, to pour out on the worshipping Mr. Codd those first conceptions which he afterwards elaborated in wonderful scriptures;—in fact I am convinced that he made his books by talking about them. And indeed certain refiners managed to get such an exaggerated notion of the value of this collaboration, of this assistance rendered by Tommy, that there were rumours abroad, foolishly credited, that T. Rembrandt helped him

to write them. These bruits and suspicions Tommy did not discourage by any inordinate vehemence of denial; but what laid them by the heels once for all, as far as the observing part of the community was concerned, were a few thin, drab, unhitched compositions which our man by some unfortunate inspiration ushered to publicity from his unassisted brain. Still, notwithstanding that revelation, for most of the world Tommy continued the man who helped to trail the clouds of glory. And when in a few years more the Great Genius was gathered to his fathers, loaden with years and honours, in the very eye and starlight of fame, it was T. Rembrandt Codd who stood by his bedside, held his dying hand, and received his ultimate benediction.

II

It will be anticipated from the foregoing, that after the death of the Great Genius, T. Rembrandt took on a hitherto unexperienced importance. He developed, in fact, into the authority. Certain Manuscripts which his revered friend had left he edited with piety, and adorned with Prefaces in which discretion tempered enthusiasm. To be sure, a sullen gentleman residing in the neighbourhood of Charing Cross, declared these Prefaces to be the Apostles' Creed without the mysteries; but this ill-natured *boutade* was drowned in the acclamations of the polite. For these

last, in fact, Tommy grew rapidly into a personage. He passed for one of your wits, a right jocose character. Besides, was he not the depository of the high tradition, the administrator of the dark sayings? Where else were the late Great Genius's opinions on any subject to be ascertained? T. Rembrandt, therefore, was supremely happy. To support adequately his personage he had nothing harder to do than to trifle; and to swell with importance over trifles was the boundary of his desire. And in truth he had been kindly equipped by Nature for such a part as he had now to play: he had a certain neatness at all those little arts in which the intelligence has little share; an immoderate love of talking; and in addition one faculty which in his case may fairly be said to have some connection with letters, to wit, a remarkable memory for what he had heard the Great Genius say. The Great Genius had talked to him at one time or another a little of everything; and the good Tommy, coming out in the swing of conversation with one of his hero's observations, did not always think it congruous to blight the delighted smiles shining on him by an awkward discrimination and waiving of unmerited applause. I repeat it, he passed for a wit.

However, the Great Genius continued to be dead, and the Codd family continued very much alive. For our friend Thomas one effect of this was that the Codd notions, the Codd point of view, temporarily submerged by the ideas and point of view of the Great

Genius, floated once more gaily to the top. The Codd notions and view of life, to do them justice, were tremendously strong: they were the kind of notions you could not come daily in contact with without taking them off, so to speak, on your clothes. And if you didn't have some antiseptic of your own, some anti-Codd, as it were, constantly at hand, they were apt to penetrate the clothes into the system. Now, for T. Rembrandt the Codd notions were native and natural; he had never of himself taken thought to rebel against them. Of himself, he had no anti-Codd whatever. It was not the Codd notions, but the notions of the Great Genius which were for him unnatural. So it fell out, as occurs in all processes of nature, all returns to our natural selves, that for Thomas the transition from one set of ideas, one position to another, was so gentle that our man didn't suspect there was any transition going on at all. Certainly, the Codd-Kensington-carpet-emporium notions and the notions of the Great Genius could hardly be said to smelt well—nay, if you want the plain truth, they smelted devilish ill; but in Tommy's brain they began to get inextricably confused. Before long he couldn't tell what was Great Genius and what was Codd.

In those days old Codd was nailed to his chair by the palsy, and used to be rolled round the house swearing and spitting and prophesying ruin and dishonour for the family, because the son of the

house would not decide to save him from being swindled by succeeding him at the "carpet-emporium". He generally shouted all day. His vociferations reached even as far as the Tottenham Court Road, and deputed clerks, picked dauntless men, presented themselves from time to time to render an account. His mother begged, his sisters implored T. Rembrandt to bring peace to the bosom of his family; and after what I have suggested as to his mental condition, you will not be surprised to hear that he yielded to their entreaties. He was aided to his resolution by a hitherto unsuspected inclination of his own towards the display of carpet on the shiny floor, the customer, the bargain, the bill, the dunning letter, and the other attributes of a brisk retail trade. Unquestionably he still remained the chief apostle and expounder of the Great Genius; nothing, as he himself said proudly, could take that from him; but between being that and the flourishing manager of a "carpet-emporium" he no longer perceived the discrepancy.

III

In due course, that is to say, about eight years after the events above narrated, old Codd was carried off by a stroke while he was storming at his youngest daughter because she wanted to marry Debeers M'Grush, the well known concert baritone and light-opera performer, and T. Rembrandt assumed

the reins of government at the Emporium. And here we have no mere figure. T. Rembrandt settled himself on the box-seat as a man who did mean driving, gathering up his reins steadily, deliberately, tooling along, as they say, his coach-full of carpets not only to avoid a spill, but with the gusto of one who intends to keep up a good rattling pace. Yet, amid all this excitement, the Great Genius, "our revered and distinguished friend", was not forgotten—oh dear no!—but the tradition of our revered friend was being day by day more and more overspread, or rather impregnated, with pure Codd. By the time we have come to, the excellent Tommy had got into the habit of coming out daily with veritable chunks of Codd—about, for instance, the necessity of a man having a decent position, knowing the right people, belonging to the right clubs, marrying the right girl, mistrusting and abusing what one can't understand, with the rest of the chapter; and these views, to lend them force, he did not hesitate to father on his revered friend without blinking. So it came to pass that poor Shadders, the painter, and Close, the enigmatic, reserved, and elusive poet, who had sat with the Great Genius as friends, were by Mr. Codd ostentatiously cut on the reasonable ground, that as he did not happen to know precisely where they came from, they were not desirable people to be seen with. These men, for another thing, were not successful, and under the Codd search-light nothing

shewed up more damning than that. The Great Genius, to be sure, had always insisted that there was infallibly an element of vulgarity in all mere success, but one was far enough by this time from the views of the Great Genius undefiled.

However, the main thing for us to note is that the Great Genius, renowned as he had been in his lifetime, had had an immense increase of vogue since his death. His printed works, one might say, had reached the ends of the earth, raising in all countries not obviously barbarous a wonderful enthusiasm and curiosity. It followed that various pilgrims from all lands yearly set foot in England with the purpose of gathering the unpublished rumour, the legend, the oral tradition. To whom in these circumstances should they naturally turn but to the chief apostle and very guardian of that tradition, to him who had held the dying hand and received the ultimate benediction?

But what, after all their pains, they got, what they saw in the sacred grove, not seldom proved too much for the strongest heads. Tommy was blending Codd and Great Genius more than ever. He blended it so good and so well that the distinguished foreigners who flocked, as we have indicated, from the nethermost parts of the earth to the Emporium in the Tottenham Court Road, stood on the parti-coloured carpets agape, astonished. From these interviews, these agitating initiations, the distinguished foreigners used to stagger out into the unlovely street, blear-

eyed, flushed, with their hats on the wrong way and their collars awry;—embarrassed and panic-stricken apparitions fleeing to the British Museum, where before the printed works of the Great Genius they would bury themselves in a haggard dream which soon took on the proportions of delirium. Their task, you see, was nothing simpler than to reconcile the written word with the oral tradition; to reconcile Great Genius at its best with Codd at its worst. They tried—oh yes, they did their best, poor puzzled distinguished foreigners! with amazing adroitness: but before the magnitude and complications of the business they felt creep over them an unholy sensation of despair.

It is honourable to human ingenuity that in the end they succeeded. The esteemed Professor Altschüler, Chief of the Philologisches Seminar in the University of Zweibrücken, has prepared, with the aid of other scholars, the definite monograph in which Codd and Great Genius are, by the most extraordinary subtlety of reasoning, blended once for all into one system. He who writes these words has been favoured with a sight of the MS. and can attest that it is a perfect miracle of coaptation. So it falls out that pure Codd will go down to posterity as the marrow of the Great Genius, and posterity will have wherewith to sharpen its teeth. Indeed, one cannot but reflect with complacency upon the numerous elucidative review-articles, contributions to the magazines, and letters to the Press, this affair will occasion in the future. The

duality of character which some of our able critics find in Shakespeare will be but a catspaw to this.

And the recollection of those various hypotheses as to Shakespeare's religion and morals, his method of composition, and the rest of it, advanced so complacently through so many generations, puts me in mind to add, that although it is indisputably a strange effect of power bestowed verily by Heaven itself that our Professor should be enabled to put forth arguments convincing not only to others but apparently to himself, weaving, as it were, Codd and Great Genius into a seamless coat which all of us, in turn, are willing to carry; still, for all that, it must be conceded that before the respectful eyes of the assiduous, and especially of the initiated, there does peep out here and there a hint of indecorum, which gives an uneasy suspicion that while the Head of the Philologisches Seminar was penning certain lines of his book, a sardonic leer was wrinkling his old mug. But however that may be, he keeps his secret. That is just the beauty of the honourable Professor: he gives nothing away.

VERSCHOYLE'S HOUSE

VERSCOYLE'S HOUSE

— En, quo discordia cives
Perduxit miseros! En, quis consevimus agros!

Sir John Holdershaw, living retired in Paris in the year 1689, went one day to the Comédie, where was acted a piece by Boursault with which he was much discontented. When he had returned to his lodgings, he wrote in his note-book, after violently censuring the play, what follows: "In the first act, before I went "asleep, there was a part (but 't is true; writ here by "Mons. Borsalte in a vein of fooling) which minded me "(though far enough off), and my countryman Mr. "Amcotts too, of a story told in our country of old "Mr. Verschoyle, in King Charles and Oliver Protec- "tor's time: And I did promise a gentleman last night "I would write it down for him; but what with watch- "ings and silly healths my fingers and head tremble "woundily of a morning."—Some time later he composed his differences with King William's govern- ment, and returned to live quietly on his estates. His life in the country seemed to weigh heavily upon him, and it was, as he said, "To tear myself from my "chagrins, and the slow hours, and the thoughts of "poisonous devouring rascals who have drawn me

"in, and now undermine me in the country, that I have undertook to reach down some bright pictures hanging in my mind, which soon must fade otherwise." Accordingly he wrote out various pieces concerning the adventures of his life, and also three or four tales he had picked up here and there; among them the one he had been reminded of at Paris. It is chiefly from Sir John's narrative that the ensuing pages have been taken.

I

In the early part of 1645, on a cold dull morning, King Charles, walking slowly, against his wont, in the Christ Church meadow at Oxford, read carefully some papers he had taken out with him. Two gentlemen in attendance, Mr. William Legge of the Bed-chamber and a certain lord, loitered a few paces behind. After a while, the king paused, and half turning looked at the lord, who hastened forward.

"Here is a report that concerns your country, my lord", said the King, and he put his finger on a closely written paper.

The nobleman, who was short-sighted, bent over to see better, and then he smiled in spite of himself. "It is old Mr. Verschoyle," he said.

But the King was in no laughing humour. "He is little better than a traitor!" he exclaimed warmly. "Nay, I think him worse. He claims to be loyal and

well-affected, and yet, though it appears he has a great estate, he has lent neither money nor any comfort in these troubles, nor shewn any affection to me or my cause save by vain words. He deserves to be disjusticed, and his house beset. I tell you truly, my lord, the carriage of this Mr. Verschoyle and men like him, who will not declare themselves freely, but float up and down with the tide of the war, has given me as much grief as almost any misfortune since this damnable rebellion. Yes, men who act as this man, I tell you, would be glad of my ruin. They go all ways in the world to destroy their king. For what is that they do, but making a common cause, giving countenance, and taking hands with the rotten-hearted villains who go about seducing the honest tenantry of the country from their devotion?—Has this man any excuse? Is he hampered? Has he compounded? The report says not.”

“Sir, he is old”, answered the nobleman, who was of the Privy Council, and had himself suffered many thousand pounds’ loss for the King. “He is all but seventy; some say more. He was at court in the Queen’s time, and continued there some years after your royal father came into England. I have heard he was much noticed by the Lord Chancellor Bacon, at whose house he pried curiously in crucibles, and alembics, and the arts of nigromancers; searching spells, the philosopher’s stone, and the principle of life. He married but a few years ago in his old age the

young daughter of Sir Thomas Foulkes, who went to Italy long before our troubles began, and who, returning to England to marry his daughter, died suddenly on the wedding night, having been, as they say, slain by Verschoyle with his wizardries. His daughter, a great heiress, had been betrothed from her young age to her cousin Sir Edward Morvan, now or lately with Sir Richard Byron at Newark, and a very true servant of your Majesty; but her father was so besotted by old Verschoyle's charmings (for it could be nothing else) that she was forced to the old man's bed. Where her fortune now is", continued the lord, seeing that the King listened, "or what enjoyment she has of it, none can say. As for Mr. Verschoyle himself, when I taxed him with his passiveness in regards your Majesty's service, going to his house myself to that end, he burst forth in a thousand excuses and reasons to shew why he could not further the cause: as that his tenants were sullen and unruly, that he had a great charge of servants for his lady's needs, and was put to it to maintain the tenants in their holdings. And in truth, Sir, for these four or five years he has lived in a mean poor way, his family ill-clad, and keeping but two old horses in his stable. Some maintain he has great sums bestowed in the Low Countries, and with merchants at Genoa. In truth", concluded the nobleman, who had his own reasons for wishing that part of the country to remain free of soldiery, "I humbly think

that to despatch a troop for the harrying and wasting of his house and lands would do your Majesty small service—no, not now, nor any time later.”

As he listened, the King kept rapping impatiently on the papers he held. “Has he discovered himself?” he now inquired. “Has he ever told out boldly in any company what side he is on in these struggles?”

“Sir”, returned the nobleman, with some change in his demeanour, “I have been shewn a little tract which, though he did not put his name, ’tis certain he wrote, and the title was, if I remember right: ‘Problems necessary to be Determined by All that have or have not taken Part on Either Side in this Unnatural War’ ”.—At this the King stared for an instant with amazed and angry eyes, and then almost against his will, as it were, smiled out at his attendant. “Yes”, pursued that one, smiling now himself, “and the inside was as dark and double-dealing as the title, the writing being so close and folded no man could tell what foot the writer stood upon. Nevertheless, that he has some agreements with the Round-heads I know well, from a sure hand; but” (added the speaker with a serious want of tact) “he claims to be uxorious and governed by his wife, whose cousins are deeply engaged on that side.—If he were harried and his house fired”, said the lord, again reverting to his anxiety, “the cause would be little better off; for if he were killed his tenants would rebel and surely would not pay, and if he escaped,

seeing his monies lie abroad, he could doubtless without difficulty, by the strict relations he has maintained in London, obtain a pass from the Parliament to go beyond seas."

"And a good ending too", said the King vehemently; "a most desirable ending, to rid this distracted kingdom of him and all like him. He is worse in my sight than a declared rebel. A strange time", quoth the King somewhat bitterly, "a strange bad time with no blessing on it, when men can fence and argue and try all means to find out how little they can do for their lawful sovereign. When I see", he continued graciously, "what you, my lord, and other loyal subjects suffer in my cause even here in this town; packed together, living coarse and meanly, with only the sad spectacle of war and sickness; while it consoles and cheers me in these trials, yet it does incense me the more against base wretches even as this man who use cunning and tricks to lie snug at home."—He had, however, notwithstanding his indignation, evidently taken notice of his attendant's hint as to the inexpediency of dragooning Mr. Verschoyle in his house; and he had besides more important affairs to engage him than that gentleman's contumacy. And therefore it was that after a pause he merely said, with that mixture of melancholy and dignity which was his greatest charm and enabled him to pass grandly through the most galling situations, frequent enough since the war began, wherein cir-

cumstances compelled him to forego his most cherished desires—well, perceiving something like that to be the situation now, he deliberately quenched his anger and only said, looking meanwhile afar off vaguely at the bare trees and spectral river, where the morning mist still hung, as if he watched a scene enacting there,—“Whensoever it shall please God”, said the King slowly, “to enable me to look upon my friends like a King, they shall thank God for the pains they have spent in my cause.” And having said that, he drew forth another paper and fell to talking of a different matter.

But if the King, at the time he was comminating Mr. Verschoyle, had been suddenly transported from Oxford to Mr. Verschoyle's house, his wrath, instead of dropping, must have sensibly increased. It chanced to be the day that Mr. Verschoyle gathered in his rents; and there were the tenants coming up to the door quietly, and laying on the table in the panelled hall where Mr. Verschoyle himself sat by a rousing fire,—not, as you might fancy, just half or a quarter of what they owed, which in those troubled times, when most of the great estates were disorganized, and the tenants froward and demoralized, many landlords would have been glad to get,—but, wonderfully enough! the full amount as ever, and that without sulks, or murmuring, or making the disturbed state of the country an excuse for their unwillingness to

pay. It is true that these peasants, when they came out from the dark house blinking into the daylight, bore a look of astonishment and relief as though they had just passed safely through a danger, and some of them replaced curious rustic charms and amulets which they had kept in their hands while they were indoors carefully back in their clothes; but their uneasiness was not provoked by parting with a sum of money. On the contrary, they rejoiced that they had got that business over: now they might sleep another year without affliction, or terror of marauding, burning troops, the rumour of whose wild doings elsewhere had reached them vaguely; or worse still! of those witches and devils who come by night in the country places, laying waste the land, tearing the careful thatch from roofs, and leaving in their train strange languors and wasting diseases among the strong men and the cattle, and slowness, palenesses and faintings among the unmarried girls. The truth is, Mr. Verschoyle's reputation as a wizard pervaded the countryside; to encounter him at night would kill a child in the mother's womb; if he entered your house it was an omen of the most deadly; to affront him was more than the boldest dared to do. Better to eat grass and bitter herbs, and lie cold at night, than to see old Verschoyle at your door asking for his rent. Had not the daughter of Will Lees, off there in the fen, whose father had withstood the esquire to his face that his thin undrained land yielded not

the rent put upon it, from a fine buxom girl fallen suddenly into such a decay and consumption that her flesh took on the colour of blue and her bones rattled;—being vexed with no natural sickness, but undeniably by magical art, as was proved the night she died. For her mother sitting by her, the girl fell to groaning that one was pulling her out of bed by the feet, and upon the mother asking who was pulling her, says the poor creature: “ ‘Tis Squire Verschoyle who has sat this hour at the foot of the bed.” Yes, and when the corpse was borne to the churchyard, and the grave was found to be too short, all were convinced that the wizard had distorted the thin body so that it might not lie easily in its place of burial.

Still, though there were reasonable terrors for every hour under Mr. Verschoyle, there were immense advantages also. It was owing to his magic power, people thought, that there was so little sickness on the land, and that since the war broke out they had lived unharassed by soldiery. Indeed, so important seemed these advantages to Mr. Verschoyle's tenants, that although they did not love him at all, and trembled in his presence, they would not have exchanged him for any other landlord in England. Little they cared for King or Parliament! In the struggle which was now devastating the country they were not partizans; or rather, owing to their master's skilful training, they were solely partizans of Mr. Verschoyle.

He had already induced in them that temper which later blazed out generally in the South and West, when the peasantry, or "Clubmen" as they were called, banded themselves together to drive both armies impartially from their neighbourhood. This temper which, as we know, was roused in the "Clubmen" by plundering and ruthless exactions, Mr. Verschoyle called up, so to speak, in advance by descriptions of these miseries, and threats, kept purposely vague, of their imminence, and the consequent withdrawal of his protection; so that his tenants were at last determined to chase from their fields the troops of either side. It was not, however, that they seriously feared invasion: the King no doubt was great, and the Parliament great too, but what were they against the powers of the unseen world? Under the government of those incalculable powers whose weapons their squire, old Mr. Verschoyle, possessed and occasionally brandished, they did, no doubt, live in a perpetual tremor; but that was alleviated after all by the genuine advantages already mentioned.

And these advantages, these striking immunities, were certainly solid enough, considering the time, to make people who enjoyed them put up with a great deal, though the causes of them of course were to be looked for elsewhere than the common people imagined. That the estate had escaped invasion from the contending armies, and demands for free quarters, was largely sheer luck. It lay remote from

the theatre of war, one boundary of it being desolate coast; it was not a good country wherein to manœuvre squadrons; and, perhaps chief of all, there were no fortified or garrisoned houses anywhere near to attract attention. The northern boundary of Mr. Verschoyle's estate touched a tract of land which had belonged to his father-in-law, lately dead, and was now merged in his own; while his only neighbour was Sir Edward Morvan, whose house stood about fifteen miles away to the west. He was therefore free from local influences and a neighbouring gentry who might from one reason or another have driven him to take action in the war, as happened in other parts of the country where the conflict, during the first years of it at any rate, was greatly embittered by little local provincial jealousies and quarrels, men taking that fair opportunity to pay off old rancours which had been gathering for years before the war, and which had nothing to do with the high matters they were ostensibly fighting for. Furthermore, he was careful even now, but especially a little later on—say, just after Naseby, when affairs took an unmistakable turn against the King—he was careful to pay with scrupulous regularity the monies exacted by assessment from the land.

These seem to be the chief causes why Mr. Verschoyle and his tenants had dwelt hitherto unmolested, and it will be seen he had himself done hardly anything to bring this happy condition about, though

of course like many others he had taken the trouble to get Protections both from the King and the Parliament, upon which however he was too shrewd to depend. But on the other hand, that his people had been so little afflicted by that terrible fever and ague which was always lurking in the cottages up and down England, may fairly be put down to his credit. For a man of that age he took an extraordinary interest in drainage and sanitation, the importance of which he probably understood from the valetudinary Bacon, in whose house he had spent so much time; and when after the death of King James he came into the country for good, he set himself to overhaul the dwelling-houses on his estate,—not, it must be confessed, from any genial feeling for the welfare of his tenants, but simply from a scientific concern to have things as they should be.

No; magic had doubtless nothing to do with the unusual prosperity of Mr. Verschoyle and his tenants; and yet as they saw him this day and every day that he took his rents, it is no wonder that the stoutest quailed. The hall where he sat, panelled to the ceiling with black oak, was gloomy enough, and the gloom was thickened by the stained glass which filled the high windows. Watching Mr. Verschoyle as he sat there taking money, none could doubt that he knew his reputation and condescended to the lowest tricks to maintain it. He had never changed from the dress of King James's reign; but his daily costume,

all but the deep ruff, was at this moment concealed by a black cloak stained with crimson, cast about his shoulders, while on his head he had placed a kind of mitre scrolled with cabalistic signs. At the table, covered with large books heavily bound and clasped, was seated near him a one-eyed rascally-looking man, devoted soul and body to Verschoyle, who served as his steward, and might well be taken for his familiar in unholy rites. And as the brief afternoon waned, and the night seemed gradually to advance in veritable wafts of blackness across the chamber, where the fire now glowed redly through the twilight, those who had been late in leaving home and had unwisely tarried till this hour, found something terrific and portentous in those two figures. Neither spared any shameful mummary to strike terror into the simple peasants who stood before them awe-stricken. Old Verschoyle would clutch the money they tendered with his huge hands and mumble over it certain charms and spells, and then pass it along to the steward who, while pretending to go through the like indecency, would diligently count the pieces. Nor did the old man shrink from the poorest antics of the mountebank. It happened, to give one instance, in the course of the afternoon that a man who had brought his wife with him actually ventured to complain, whereupon Mr. Verschoyle, noting that the hall was pretty full and a performance would not be wasted, picked up some grains of a powder he had

carefully laid by him, cast them into a glass of water, and spreading his great hands over it as the liquid turned red, cried out in a terrible voice, "Blood, Blood!"—upon which the one-eyed droll with horrible contortions began to drink it. The woman, who was with child, was taken with a trembling fit, and she and her husband passed haggardly away, all present shrinking from those blighted ones.

It would seem as if Nature, foreseeing the part he was to play in his old age, had carefully prepared for him an adequate appearance; every wrinkle on that extraordinary visage seeming to be laid there to produce a duly calculated effect. Towards the end of 1636, upon one of his visits to London, becoming as time went on rarer and rarer, he was seen at some gathering by the painter Van Dyck who, after considering him for a little, holding meanwhile his under lip between his thumb and finger as his manner was when he was taking in a subject, drew near at last, and accosting Mr. Verschoyle with much civility offered to make his portrait. This portrait still exists in the possession of my worthy friend, Nicolas Ursal, Esquire, of Fraynes, and any one who examines it carefully can see that Van Dyck welcomed here a genuine subject, coming to him perhaps as a relief amid the endless round of fashionable portraits—apt to become insipid in the long run even for a man so enamoured of elegance and the dainty fragile things of life as he was—and painted this one happily,

“with his heart”, as people say. With what force and inspiration, with what indescribable *brio*, the great bald skull, the beaked predatory nose, the long beard, beneath which you divine the firm pitiless mouth, even to the old-fashioned vesture of the last reign—yes, with what conviction all these are rendered; leaping out as it were from a picture of which the dominant tone, nevertheless, is sombre. But what perhaps shews most of all that Van Dyck was interested in this work, is the certainty we have, that instead of falling back, as was his languid, somewhat insolent wont, upon the hired models with well-shaped hands he kept by him to supply delicate hands to his troop of sitters, here he has rendered Mr. Verschoyle's hands just as he found them: thick, broken-nailed, knotty, cruel—“Grand hands of a strangler”, said the artist to himself, smiling admiringly, as he painted them in with gusto. Nor are the very height and clumsy massiveness of the model's frame evaded or attenuated to gentler proportions in the picture.

Mr. Verschoyle's conversation, too, Van Dyck must have found a distraction from that of the people he usually dealt with. Verschoyle's coarse abusive wit, his command of vituperation and the large phrase, entertaining as it sometimes was, he shared however with some others; notably with his friend Sir Kenelm Digby. But what was piquant in his character was the conjunction of baseness—

an ignoble occupation with the meanest and most sordid things,—and a strange idealism, dreamy, yet coldly speculative rather than enthusiastic. In his youth he had been a hard-drinking, hard-fighting, unscrupulous scoundrel. One of his maxims had been that if you start by refusing to say “By your leave” to the world, the world will end by saying it to you. He had played a thousand pranks: he is said to have accompanied Sir Walter Raleigh on his wild voyage to the Oroonoko. Later, when he was almost middle-aged, he had been entertained, as we have already learned, for some time at Gorhambury; accepted, we may be sure, by the subtle, refining owner of the place, to whom all other gifts save mental ones seemed almost negligible, for some gift, keenly desired, which separated him plainly from the crowd. But in his studies, pursued untiringly at that beautiful seat, he had felt himself bound to follow the system of learning advocated by his entertainer, which implied a contemptuous intolerance of the fantastical and unnecessary, and a grave impatience of such speculations as by their nature were not susceptible of logical demonstration, excepting only (possibly from other than religious promptings, and perhaps on the whole, less sincerely than he would have it appear) the mysteries of the Christian faith,—well, Mr. Verschoyle followed in all that but a certain distance, and had then boldly struck off into a path of his own; devoting himself with passionate intensity to uncer-

tain, godless, ill-reputed studies: the arts of the nigromancer, spells, witchcraft, the notation of omens, alchymical divinings, the transmutation of base metals, the present resurrection of the dead; with curious wayward meditations upon the influence the spirits of those we have known in life have after their death for good or ill upon the fortunes of the living. Even by jealous professional operators he was acknowledged to be at this time the most excellent proficient in England, and perhaps in Europe, for resolving horary questions; and beyond that, he was reported so well versed in the Black Art as to practise the circular way of invoking spirits with a success to which none other could pretend. Neither did his master expressly discourage him in these pursuits, watched him rather with a kind of bantering scepticism: such studies were mazy and confused, he thought, and ended, it was to be anticipated, nowhere, nor could anyone declare certainly how much of them was verity and how much vanity. Besides, either from deep policy, or—with that baffling tortuous mind who can tell?—perhaps from genuine piety, he let it be known that he considered “similar enquiries must be bounded by religion or else they “would be subject to deceit and delusion”; and how far amid these magical labyrinths could one travel without encountering Sathanas himself, and tendering a hand for his powerful yet fatal aid as he prowled there in his congeries? So at least men should be

encouraged to think; and all means and figures, even fables and old wives' tales, should be employed to prevent the world from wandering vaguely after high and vaporous imaginations to the manifest injury of a laborious and sober inquiry of truth. For such imaginations begat hopes and beliefs of strange and impossible shapes, and therefore (Verschoyle often heard him say it with his fine meaning smile, using almost the very words he had written, as they sat pleasantly at table, where the sweet breath of the flowers came and went through the windows "like the warbling of music")—therefore it was to be noted in those sciences which held so much of imagination and belief as magic, alchemy, astrology, and the like, that in their propositions the description of the means was ever more monstrous than the pretence or end. And these frivolous experiments, he was wont to add a little scornfully, were as far differing in truth of nature from such a knowledge as we require, as the story of King Arthur of Britain or Hugh of Bordeaux differed from Caesar's Commentaries in truth of story. But furthermore, it was for Mr. Verschoyle and experimenters like him to observe, that however entrancing these occult studies, these dizzying voyages through the uncharted seas of knowledge, harrowed by tempests and lit by ruddy flames—even Hell-fire itself!—beating above, around, what do I say? on the very hands and face of the desperate navigator, whereof one might concede, if you wished,

that the gains would be so well worth the hazards once the headlands passed, the haven won—ah yes, however exciting and bewildering these quests which enhanced the discreet enthusiasm of the scholar with something of the passionate intention of the gamester, there were other studies, in effect, so much more real, so much more worth while: kingcraft, statecraft, the law even, which had the reputation of being so dry, but which, as people knew, he himself had shewn at various times, and notably in his Charge upon the poisoning of Sir Thomas Overbury, could be rendered on due occasion vivid, flexible, entertaining as a romance. And had you not the arts (though this appeal Mr. Verschoyle, who was unfamiliar with the fine arts, might not be expected to take in, any more than, coarse and full-feeding himself, he could understand that delicacy of the senses which induced in the Lord Keeper a sickness and faintness if a servant came into his presence shod in neat's leather)—but had you not the arts which came pleasantly to the spirits: poetry, the falls of low music in bowers on a moonlit night, sculpture, the cadences of rhetoric? Nor were these mere toys, as men of weak judgment might conceive, but all related among themselves and to the great order of the world. Consider for example the trope of music to avoid or slide from the close or cadence—well, was not that common with the trope of rhetoric? Again; is not the delight (as he wrote so charmingly and truly) of the quavering

upon a stop of music, the same with the playing of light upon the water?

By some such reasonings did the illustrious sage endeavour to draw his guest to honourable learning, albeit lightly and intermittently, as one who cared little whether his arguments took effect or no. After all, the broad placid river of learning was fed by innumerable rills, and it might be unwise to divert or dam up even the most apparently turbid. So too perhaps he had reasoned when he seemed willing to examine seriously the "Sympathetick Powder" of the youthful Kenelm Digby, that wonderful salve which was vouched to heal though a man were bleeding to death at a distance of thirty miles, and consequently made such a heavy demand upon human credulity;—going so far, they say, in his complaisance as a willingness to register the drug among the observations he proposed adding, had he lived, by way of appendix to his Natural History. And yet the compound itself, both in its constituent parts—moss of a dead man's head, man's grease, and the rest,—and in the odd method of utilising it,—never touching (as one might anticipate according to the practice of the craftiest surgeons) the wound itself with the salve, but dressing and anointing instead each morning the weapon wherewith the wound was given; only laying at the same time upon the wound a linen cloth wet in the patient's urine:—ah, what else could all that be but one of those gross attempts to block and darken

true science of which he wrote so sternly: "The impostor is prized, and the man of virtue taxed. Nay, we see the weakness and credulity of men is such, as they will often prefer a mountebank or witch before a learned physician." But when the "Powder of Sympathy" was put before the world he was old, and perhaps more tired than he seemed; he had fallen from extraordinary glory and had drunk his full of gall and humiliation; all the powers and honours he had so feverishly struggled and schemed for all his life may now, tardily, have taken on a dun and uncertain look;] and noting that, he may have disposed himself to regard all things else with an ironical tolerance. And of that tolerance Mr. Verschoyle, for one, reaped the benefit. This last, for his part, the large, sanguine, sophistical projector, had been taken with a veritable enthusiasm for the "Powder of Sympathy"; and when not long after he made the acquaintance of the man who had promulgated its virtues, he found him congenial and they became friends.

That romantic figure, buccaneer, swashbuckler, duellist, braggart, alchymist, poet, architect, courtier, theologian—what else? who passes to and fro so vividly and gallantly across the stage of the seventeenth century, generally feared, always admired, though never quite respected or trusted,—"a teller of things strange", as Evelyn calls him good-humouredly; who constantly vapoured and hectored, but with such an

air that men dared not laugh at the one or resent the other;—how could he fail to attract one of Mr. Verschoyle's nature and intellect? For this was the man who would be found in years to come declaring himself a Cavalier and Catholic, and yet managing the amazingly dexterous exploit of keeping a foot at once in the court of Cromwell and in that of the widow of the late King: a man, who was completely untroubled, it would seem, by moral principles, or scruples, or restraints, and who seriously believed and acted upon what he wrote, "That no man is to be lamented for finding any means, whatsoever it be, to please and gratify himself", which however did not prevent him from discussing doctrinal points of a religion he held apparently with no ardour, and so little of the spirit that one is led to believe he joined the Church of Rome for little else than the pleasure of flaunting in the face of the world the paradox of a man taking immense risks for what he did not care a straw about. Sir Kenelm's notion of friends was that "those are to be esteemed good that are the least ill"; and he found Mr. Verschoyle, although many years older than himself, a man so young, so eager, so curious, so loud too and turbulent on occasion, so indifferent to other men's censures, that he lived much with him, and took great delight in his qualities and conversation. The very bulk and size of the two men, and their tendency to domineer, made them appropriate companions. After Sir Kenelm's return from his piratical cruise

in the Mediterranean, but especially after the death of his wife, when he retired to Gresham College to pursue the study of chemistry, and to divert his melancholy by learned discourses, he was often to be seen in Mr. Verschoyle's company, clad in the sad-coloured clothes he now affected which, like the straggling beard he had grown since his bereavement, matched congruously enough with the other's presence.

As for Verschoyle, that part of his nature which had been least valued at Gorhambury, the gross and coarse part, which was on the whole the strongest part, he was not at the trouble of modifying to please Digby, who had indeed himself the same proclivities, though, if you will, more interrupted and softened. But though all that was very saliently there, still intellectual curiosities, a passion, never at rest in either, for rending the veil which hid the secrets of Nature, had almost as much to do with their friendship. Many discourses did they have together of rare chymical secrets, of antimonial cups, of unheard-of medicines. They watched the stars, and cast horoscopes. With the help of one Evans who lived in Gunpowder-alley, a most horrid wizard, reputed to be the familiar of the dark angel Salmon, they called up a spirit; and they being all within the body of the circle, after powerful invocation it came first in the shape of a toad, speaking high and shrilly, which proved it to be not Gabriel or Michael or any blessed Heavenly angel, who when they do speak, says one

of the wisest masters and operators, "it is like the "Irish, much in the throat". But when Verschoyle undaunted, and to the great fear of the adept, who though he had taken some cups to hearten him was in a sad trembling state, commanded the fiend in a terrible voice to leave off his tricks and come forth, there was heard a very dismal groan, and a thing dreadful, unformed, rolling at Verschoyle's feet worshipped him as its Master, and Lord of the Powers of Hell.

So we are told; but be that as it may, there can be no doubt that Sir Kenelm Digby had at one time, whatever he may have thought later, a great respect for Mr. Verschoyle's parts and curious learning. There is still extant a letter of his addressed to Verschoyle wherein, after equalling his friend for deep knowledge and high speculations to "a Brachman of "India" he had met with in Spain, and protesting in his large way that Verschoyle "had ravished the "secrets of Nature, and made the lodestone a thing "of no wonder", he goes on:—"Persuaded of those "conferrings, that I say will come drily to yourself "which it freshens me to witness. Sir, I have seen "you do that by magical arts which would blast the "eyes of ignorant vulgars and analphabetes to behold." And in a letter to another correspondent, written from Paris, he speaks ungrudgingly in a like strain, and quotes with seeming approval a saying of Verschoyle's to the effect, that a system of philosophy or religion should be like to a coat whereof the cloth is strong and

good, so that the shape can be changed many times to accommodate the needs of the body.

Later, some years before the war, they fell apart, and gradually ceased even to correspond. Whether they quarrelled, or whether Sir Kenelm's public acceptance of the doctrines of the Church of Rome, however wide and untrammelled that acceptance might be, and though Sir Kenelm seems to have held to the old distinction between the Church of Rome and the Court of Rome, considering himself bound only to the first—whether that made intercourse undesirable, or what else it was that put an end to their friendship, cannot now be determined. Certainly Mr. Verschoyle, for his part, who as he grew older became more than ever unwilling to compromise himself for trifles, as he deemed opinions and disputes about religion, would have steered clear of Sir Kenelm Digby after his appeal to the English Catholics for funds on the Queen's behalf had been discovered by the Parliament. If Verschoyle had ever had it, he had lost long ago that generosity of mind which was so constant a trait in Sir Kenelm's character. The wise man, he considered, was he who professed the religion of the dominant party in the State, and did as little as he could, without offending that party, to harass the minority. For himself, privately, he inclined to the doctrine of those old curious subtilizers of ethics whose aim has been to distinguish acts from being, what we do from what we are, pronouncing the last

alone pleasing and interesting to the gods: a doctrine which he was to find roughly adopted, and urged somewhat crudely as the effect of knowledge and the Spirit of God, by the sects called Ranters and Seekers of his own time; though, unlike him, the sectaries sheltered their equivocal teaching under the name of Christ,—calling to men to hearken to Christ within them, and maintaining that all impulses of nature, even towards things commonly forbidden, were the workings of Christ in humanity; thus in their turn curiously arriving—but by what different roads!—at almost the same landing-place as the Illuminati of Spain, or the believers in the revelation of Anthony Buckuet in France.

But it must not be understood that he was foolish enough to advertize his indifference in matters of religion: on the contrary he assumed at one time what may fairly be called, considering the personage and the way he took himself, an appalling piety, carrying his insincere mummerly so far as to deceive the eminent and judicious Bishop Juxon; the prelate regarding this penitent, whose scandals and ill-practices had been the talk of two courts, with great contentment. It remained for the good Mr. Nicholas Ferrar, to whose conventlike house, the Hall at Gidden, or Gidding, in Northamptonshire, Verschoyle in his fervour, pretending the need to search his conscience, had asked leave to make a visit, and was thereupon graciously welcomed—it needed Mr. Ferrar with his saintly eyes to discern

the genuine nature, the rank nature, the bias to sin underlying the mockery of this conversion which had duped the Bishop and other men of the world. On the second evening since his arrival, after evening prayers, which as it was an extreme cold winter night had been recited in the parlour where there was a fire burning instead of in the church, as was the ordinary use of that family, Mr. Ferrar takes Verschoyle and gently draws him before a table of brass placed on the wall of the room by the venerable Mrs. Mary Ferrar, which bore an inscription upon it composed perhaps by Herbert of Bemerton, and smiling always lays his finger on these words which made part of it:—"He "who any ways goes about to disturb us in that which "is and ought to be amongst Christians (though it be "not usual in the world), is a burthen whilst he stays, "and shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be." He did this, however, not pointedly, but rather laid his hand on the tablet as if by chance, talking meanwhile of his mother who had set it up there, and her quiet life; for he was very sensitive and gentle, and would not hurt the feelings of his guest. But it would have been all one had he been harsh and blunt: Mr. Verschoyle was not sick of that disease called tenderness of conscience, and never took an affront save when it suited his convenience; and now, not at all disconcerted, and apparently indifferent to this rebuke—if that be not too rough a word for what was done so dreamily—he lingered on a day or two more, howling at night

over his sins, claiming to see his sweet Jesus, and raving out other blasphemous and hypocritical indecencies too odious to repeat. When at length he took himself away, the family offered up special purifying orisons: had they been as Popishly disposed as many fancied, they would certainly have exorcised their dwelling-place with consecrated water. As it was, for days following there was an uneasiness, an indescribable *malaise* in the house, an unwonted sluggishness and untowardness troubling its calm and sedateness, as though the Father of all Evil had in reality passed there.

Yes, the base part of Mr. Verschoyle's nature was by far the strongest, and it was that which as he grew old, coagulating into avarice, had most to do with his retirement into the country. And yet, just as in his youth it was a mixture of dreaming and rapacity which had sent him voyaging to the other side of the earth with Sir Walter Raleigh in search of gold, so now in his old age, mingled curiously with the habits of the miser which led him to reside constantly on his estate for the purpose of grinding money out of his tenants, there was also something of the temper of the fastidious builder of visions—visions of Heaven or Hell, of sweet faces or places, of fantastical nether worlds, what matters it?—who prefers to live solitary, to sacrifice many sympathies, and adopts an unfriendly and repellant attitude towards mankind, simply from the fear that others may do or say that which would

disturb the rhythmic life he has so carefully organized; even as a shriek tearing through a happy dream awakens the sleeper to the trifling of fools or the desolation of tears. But to gain high and worthy ends, he never thought of making the sacrifices or going to the trouble and inconveniences he did to gain bad; and the bad of course predominated. All his life he had been able at any moment to relinquish his favourite studies and intellectual pursuits, but he had never been able—anyhow he had never cared to abjure rapine, lust, riot, all of which, now that he was old, had rolled themselves into avarice, not so much from the love of money itself, as because that was the only field open at last for the exercise of the undying instincts of the bird of prey, the robber and marauder, the overbearing tyrant. This eagerness to gain treasure, to wrench from others their property, which in the Middle Age would have sent him pillaging and ravaging the land with a horde at his back, and which he had never been quite free of even in those early years when the harsher vices sit unnaturally on a man; those hard propensities which led him, for example, as it was currently told, so far as to perjure himself early in the present reign in his desperate efforts to escape the fine imposed on him for declining the obligatory honour of knighthood, increased as he became aged and rose up about him like a ruining tide, drowning as it were all else except what was indeed akin, his passion for domination, which, in its

turn he gratified, not arrogantly, but rather by stealthy covered ways and serpentine windings gaining his ends, bringing people to his mind. The scandal of his marriage, a business in which he enthralled and intimidated the already dying Sir Thomas Foulkes, and tore the young heiress almost from the very arms of her lover to share his unholy bed, was the crowning instance of his predatory capacities. After that, saving his pride in his house which he cherished and dealt with as a jewel, all his mental powers seemed willingly abandoned to the poorest sort of men's dealings with each other, tricks of bailiffs, usurers, lawyers, which had not even boldness to lend them glamour.

But his house was indeed worthy of the sedulous care he bestowed on it. Built in the time of Henry the Seventh, and enlarged by Mr. Verschoyle's father during the early years of Elizabeth, it was now become a captivating example of the middle-sized Tudor dwelling. Time, with his hand of grey, touching the stones had happily moulded them, and the storms of over a century, extremely violent in that coastward region, confusing various early crudities of the building, had but enhanced its mellowness of tone. At the end of a long summer day, when the gardens drowsily breathed a thousand sweets, and the voices of labourers ending their work in the fields might be heard faintly on the long terraces—in those flying lights the house took on a wonderful dignity and charm; so much

indeed that its young mistress, in her first lonely and unhappy summers there, was fain to linger out of doors till night fell suddenly, scarfing up the outlines, and leaving only a dark mass, grim and somehow terrifying, premonitory of the wafts of blackness to be encountered inside. But not only summer, the breath of all the seasons lingered there wooingly, increasing the singular charm of the house; and it was probably to be seen at its best towards sunset on a windless day of autumn, when a chill was in the air urging to swift movement out of doors, and that vague odour of burning wood and leaves which pervades the country in fine autumn weather suggested agreeably the bright fire on the hearth to greet one returning. Then in the changing afternoon the house stood out clearly, with the smoke rising straight from its chimneys, and behind it the sun waning amid the wild colours of a sky orange, crimson, golden; while even as one gazed came swimming into all that glory, lucid, serene, spiritual, bringing an unutterable conviction of termination and requiem, the evening star. Yes, the sky thickened, it was almost night; now truly "the labourer's task was over"; the mill ceased, birds nested, the sheep were folded; but for the call of a crow winging homeward, the far cry of a teamster to his horses, a watchdog's bark at some distant farm, the land already reposed. Ah,—as one mournfully watching the house through her tears in a kind of ecstasy would think,—could death but

come in the evening as easily and sweetly, quieting the turmoil of hearts and consciences, as the fields were stilled at the rising of yon star!—But, in effect, in all conditions, whether under snow or beaten by rain, the house offered itself seductively to the imagination. From the windows could be heard the muffled beat of the surf, and the great clamour of the sea as the tide came in. Strange birds driven ashore by the hard weather would whirl with anxious cries about the chimneys, or perch on the jutting stone-work under the roof. And on all sides rolled away and away to the horizon the plain, its level interrupted only by church-tower, or windmill, or cottage, widely dispersed, so that you could follow for miles with the eye the course of a road lying like an idly thrown piece of white tape among the fields. At the opening of the drive, opposite the entrance gate, stood the parish church, with the dead lying around it just off the high-road, who might be thought, not too fancifully! to have part and interest still in the small noise of the country-side and the few passengers who went by the way. The living was now vacant, the last incumbent having been so harassed by Mr. Verschoyle that the sexton coming to the church one morning at dawn found the body of the vicar swinging by the neck from a pillar in the gloomy aisle.

Not the least comely feature of the place were the gardens, planted at the side of the house and running far back in the rear. Mr. Verschoyle had always

cherished these gardens; he had desired the celebrated John Tradescant to control the ordering of them and to embellish them with his fancies: and indeed they were very stately, and of great curiosity and beauty. Contrived with so much skill that even in that bleak clime they offered somewhat of refreshment at all seasons, it was here the young mistress of the place loved best to spend her long pale days, tending by preference the sadder flowers which she watered, as one might surmise, with her tears. Apparently free to wander whither she chose, yet her movements in reality strictly confined to the gardens and terraces, she reminded herself in her great longing for the free air of the outer lands, and in her narrow imprisonment there, of a cart she had once seen in an Italian city conveying prisoners condemned to the galleys through the streets. The cart, although covered over, had an air-hole on the top, and through this hole appeared—so significantly, so poignantly!—a pair of coarse grimy hands waving aimlessly, as if the hopeless wretch within was thus blindly trying to identify himself, to take a last contact with the lovely freedom of the streets. Like those hands, from the same mad longing, her eyes, as she leant on the balustrade of the terrace on a calm evening, not seldom reverted to a certain far away point on the coast; there, it was said, the smugglers, coming from the Low Countries on fine dark nights, were wont to run in their contraband goods. Well, might not those men, desperate as they were,

be persuaded by the gift of the few jewels she had left to land her on the shores of the Continent; and then, somehow—never mind how—would come Italy, help, freedom! So dreaming, she would remain for an hour at a time with her elbow on the stone, resting her chin in her hand; till the mere sight of Mr. Verschoyle passing in the distance sufficed to remind her despairingly how futile it was to struggle against his will, how she was helpless as a young fluttering bird in his big hand. Nay, those very smugglers,—with whom, moreover, in all likelihood he had dealings,—would even they have the hardihood to oppose him?

Whenever she thought of freedom, she thought with passionate longing of Italy. As a young girl she had lived much at Genoa in the family of the Duchess Paola Adorno Brignole-Sale whose name she bore, and whom she was thought to resemble. However that might be, in the English Paola, at any rate, what you saw was a young woman's face which indicated that however unusual and terrible the griefs she might have to suffer in her life, she would never meet them with large tragic utterance and demeanour, but rather in the spirit of a rebuked child, pouting and surprised, and quite ready to laugh through her tears at the first intimation that the storm was over. There was in her face a sort of distressed notification that she was not being caressed—the action she could understand best; and a sort of wonder that it was omitted. She was not a tall woman, and her face

would have been conventionally pretty had it not been for a look—one would call it high-bred, save that undeniably high-bred people constantly do such abject things—but at all events a nobleness of mien which assured you that on any trying occasion she would not be found trivial and common. Yes, that; and furthermore a look of mingled terror and sadness in the large brown eyes, such as might cloud the eyes of a child who has witnessed, and partly understood atrocious violences, degrading scenes. But, as it happened, in Paola's eyes the terror prevailed over the sadness; for though she loved her lover, Sir Edward Morvan, and grieved miserably because she was deprived of his sweet company, still, as she was not one of those deep-natured, high-souled women who entangle their fate with one man, and losing him lose all, she might have consoled herself in happier circumstances even for that loss; whereas from her terror of the old man her husband there was no escape, and no consolation to modify it. Besides its very real action, increased daily by a thousand artifices, it remained with her always imaginatively, a prolongation of the sort of fear—but how much intensified! which had haunted her for a few hours in her happy childhood when she had seen a painting of the flames striking the feet of the lost let down into Hell.

To her, now, as she stood in the waning light, a black calash drawn over her head beneath which her brown eyes looked forth so mournfully, a vellum-bound

volume of Petrarch she had carried out in the early afternoon clasped in her fragile long-fingered hand, was borne faintly the voices of the tenants as they plodded homeward after the rent-paying; a laugh breaking forth now and then, or a child's playful cry, as she listened enviously—the bewitched young lady whom the country folk hardly ever saw, and spoke of under their breaths—trying to decide herself to go indoors and face the desolation, the appalling shadows, the night. And with a sickening of heart she pictured what awaited her: the evening meal in the long half-lit room which she was forced to eat, not only in the presence of her husband, but of the odious one-eyed droll his steward, who was now grown so great with Verschoyle that he must sit at table with his master. All the time that the supper lasted, Verschoyle would pour out a stream of truculent wit directed against all the neighbourhood; the one-eyed wretch, who was himself pretty often the butt, chuckling and sweating and choking with obsequious laughter. Then, the supper over, Mr. Verschoyle and this mean fellow would sit down by the fire in the dark hall to a game of gleek; but if upon these dispositions Paola offered to retire, she was loudly bidden to remain.

“My lady’s windows look towards Sir Edward Morvan’s house which is known to be unwholesome, is it not?” he would ask with a meaning laugh of the one-eyed steward, who would of course set up another sniggering laugh of acquiescence.

That man had not always been one-eyed: Paola would sob in the wildest fear when she recalled the monstrous deed which had deprived him of sight. One night, when she had been married but a few months, they were eating their meal, after the manner just described, in the gloomy panelled room. All seemed to be going no worse than usual, when Mr. Verschoyle suddenly fell silent, and after a minute brusquely ordered the servants out of the room. Then he pitched back his chair with a clatter, and towering in his immense size, menacing and formidable, he seized the weazened little steward by the ear and dragged him from his place.

"Here, you!" he said. "You eat your victuals with me without a due sense of what you are about. You lack virtue, sirrah; you have need of a congruent gymnastic to keep your mind in humility. Begin your pious exercises. Kneel down and pray to me. I am God."

The poor mean fellow, taken utterly aback by this command, fumbled pitifully. It was more than he dared to do.

"Come sir," cries Verschoyle in a loud authoritative voice, "leave off your fooling and pray as you are desired. Pray, sing a hymn in my honour, you prick-eared rascal: 'tis all that will serve your turn in this world or the next. My lady had a Puritan to her father and is an Italian papist herself, and Sir Edward Morvan, they say, is a good State-Protestant. Shew

her a new form to take up with in our pleasant home. Give her a chance to hear your cackle. Out with our Turnbull Street litany and the canticles of the Pict-Hatch fornicators, where you was bred, you caitiff. Come, begin down on your knees!"

But the man was recalcitrant: it was too much. His spirit was not as yet quite broken by Verschoyle, and certain rests of religion, or at all events of superstition, made him recoil from the blasphemy. And in effect, though he stood there trembling all over, he had the courage to stammer out a refusal. But he had scarcely time to get the words out of his mouth, before his master snatched up a candlestick and laid open his face, cutting into the nerve of the eye so that he was blinded. Paola, standing meanwhile with her back against the wainscot, her hands spread out, her eyes dilated, heard his lamentable squeal as he sunk to the ground; and then the lights flashed and wheeled, the chamber rocked, and she saw no more. But before many days the steward, his head craftily swathed, was again at his work, closeted mysteriously with the tyrant, and more devoted to his interests than ever.

Such were her painful reveries as she stood at dusk, uncertain, in the gardens. It was cold and dreary; the moisture dropped from the trees; she shivered, drew her cloak about her, and decided. But as she went strolling reluctantly towards the house, she saw her husband suddenly a few paces in front of her as if

he had surged out of the ground,—coming on her, in fact, as he always did, noiselessly, before she was aware. He had laid aside his indecent foolish hat and charlatan's robe, and stood there, with his bare skull unscreened from the wintry airs and his ragged beard blowing over his shoulder, huge and black and sinister, threatening somehow, though he was smiling, ominous, presaging disaster. He had a letter in his hand, and as he came up to her—"My sweet chuck," he cried with a horrid shew of affection which made her wince, "here comes Ned Morvan home."

The blood fluttered into her face and fell away again, like the light of a candle that is carried past a window. She remained silent.

"This is his letter," said Mr. Verschoyle waving it. "He comes home from the King's armies under a pass of the Prince, and doubtless one from the Parliament too, so he may lie snug. A brave lad, Ned Morvan, and a whiteboy wherever he goes. He will be truly welcome here. Perhaps he means to diet with us now he is home", he added, and peered through the dusk to see how this stroke took.

He did not think it necessary to explain that he was afraid to shew Morvan the cold shoulder and forbid him the house, lest the other might turn it into an affront to his cause and bring down a cavalier troop. Besides, he had heard a rumour that Morvan had the King's warrant to search out all those in that part of the country whose loyalty was equivocal or

flaccid, and to put the estates of those who refused to contribute to the royal cause at the mercy of the soldiers. After a pause, finding that his wife did not speak, he thought it worth while to drop carelessly the news that Morvan had been wounded in a skirmish.

"Wounded?" she breathed, looking at him with startled eyes.

"Who knows but he may have lost an arm or a leg?" said old Verschoyle considering her with his cruel eyes, and enjoying her dismay. "Nay, Ned used to be a pretty sprig enough, but if a musket shot has removed his nose—"

His quick ear had caught the sound of a footbeat advancing from the house. "As you see, he is even now coming towards us, so his wound must be of the slightest", said Mr. Verschoyle. And lowering his voice— "Tis a wound in the left side, I misdoubt me," he added with malevolent intention.

Then peering through the dark towards the house, where Paola could see nothing, "Ned, Ned, you come in pudding-time!" he shouted heartily.

Even as he spoke a pale young man who limped slightly, apparently between twenty-five and thirty years old, wearing his hair long, as most gentlemen did of both parties, and dressed elegantly in a habit trimmed with gold, with silver points and buttons, stepped out of the pleached alley hard by where they were standing, and greeted them debonairly with gay laughter.

II

The spring was early that year, and Sir Edward Morvan, riding light-heartedly, often with a song on his lips, to and fro between Verschoyle's house and his own, a journey he was making four or five times a week, might see the new-dropt lambs in the meadows, and innumerable violets on the roadside bank penetrating with their cool fragrance the mild air. Ah, how good it was to be in this secluded land, when all over the country men were battling and marching, lying hard at nights, risking their lives! That had been his own life till a few weeks since; later on, in a few days, a few weeks, some vague time always drawing near and always pushed farther off, that would have to be his life again. But not just yet; if the gods were kind, not yet. And as he rode thinking of all that, he would feel his wound, perfectly healed by this time save for a little superficial soreness, to excuse his slackness. Because, for once, Mr. Verschoyle had got hold of a wrong story: Morvan had no warrant from the King to raise money in the country, nor any business whatever there beyond the healing of his wound. And he had certainly exaggerated its severity in his letters to the Newark garrison—nay, he was quite equal to opening the wound afresh if the Governor, impatient as he well might be of this prolonged furlough, had threatened to send a surgeon to report on his condition. But the Governor did nothing of the

kind; on the contrary, Morvan seemed to be utterly neglected and forgotten at headquarters; and to the letters he so laboriously composed (Paola sometimes aiding him with the intelligence and fineness of a woman in love) he received no reply at all. This was unusual, even when large free allowance was made for the hindering of messengers, and to one of another character might have seemed disquieting and suspicious; but Morvan was never a man to split straws or ponder might-be's, and lazily took it for granted that the Governor was satisfied with those elaborate reasons he had put forward for not joining.

And thus day after day went by him flowingly, hazily, as a man lounging half-asleep on a hot day might watch the ripples and eddies of running water. There was a dreaming ecstasy in every hour of this wonderful spring, the most wonderful, Morvan thought, certainly the most delightful he had ever lived. To see Paola, the woman whom he loved with a great consuming love which left no room for anything but itself, and who had been stolen from him by machinations the most nefarious—to see her not once or twice, which was the limit of his hope when he first came home, but every day without restraint for long sweet spells—that was an astonishing happiness against which, if the old legends were true, some great retributive punishment must be rolling up. Well, he would face that with equanimity, come when it would, take it without murmuring, even welcome

it and think himself all the same the gainer, if it were the penalty exacted from him in exchange for the present smile of her face in his, and the touch of her hand. In the meanwhile, it was enough for his life that every night his pillow was gladdened by the thought that he was going to see her in the morning.

And the strange part was that they were left, as I have said, as untroubled, as much to themselves, as lovers could desire, Mr. Verschoyle appearing but seldom, and then only to ask with marked concern after Morvan's wound, and to bestow his benediction—it actually seemed like that—upon the pair; afterwards vanishing—well, by magic! hiding himself for days and days so inscrutably that none in the house knew where to look for him, and yet revealing himself in disquieting apparitions, now to a lonely passenger over a windy heath, and then, almost at the same hour, as those colloquing at the ale-house painfully took note, to a woman miles and miles away, as if he indeed possessed the receipt of fern-seed, and walked invisible by the aid of those black arts he was supposed to have at command. Beyond question, Sir Edward Morvan regarded Mr. Verschoyle with infinite rancour and hatred: he had come home prepared for the worst reprisals if the other should give him the shadow of an excuse to take offence: but seeing now the old man's complaisances and loose ways his stronger feelings were almost extinguished by contempt. A miserable old dotard (so he thought), who

by the long-continued practice of debaucheries dozed in his understanding, and he lamented more than ever the sacrifice of his beautiful Paola.

III

But if Morvan had known what Verschoyle was about while he was dallying, he would have changed his tune more than a little. Sir Richard Willis, who had lately succeeded Byron as Governor of Newark, amazed and furious at Morvan's long desertion of the shaken and sore-pressed garrison, without any excuse offered for his dilatoriness, had finally complained bitterly to the newly-appointed Commander-in-chief of the King's forces. In accordance with that, two letters desiring Morvan to return to his duty, one written chidingly, but the other couched in very peremptory terms, were despatched from Prince Rupert's headquarters; but they were carefully intercepted by Verschoyle, who was plotting nothing less than to ruin the cavalier with his own party, and had up to this managed to stop all expresses riding between Sir Edward and the army. Some weeks before the time we are now arrived at, Morvan being rather anxious, notwithstanding his insouciance, at the failure of letters from Newark, had himself applied directly to Prince Rupert for an extension of his furlough, using in the business a safe man, one his father, who in his time had been involved in some

delicate affairs, had often employed. This man came up with Prince Rupert at Beeston Castle, and having delivered his master's letters, which were treated as mere rigmaroles and feignings, he was entrusted with a very angry letter written by the Prince himself, in which Sir Edward was commanded upon his loyalty to join without delay, under pain of being esteemed a renegade and punished as such. The man carried also a very strong message from Morvan's closest friend, acquainting him with the bad odour he had fallen into, wondering at his supineness, and urging him to loose all that held him and return suddenly to his place.

The messenger made good speed, and coming skilfully into his own country congratulated himself on having passed through the area occupied by soldiery. As he journeyed along the familiar road, not more than five miles now from home, riding at a smart trot, sitting loosely in the saddle, and not paying much attention, suddenly he made out in front of him on the bleak unsheltered road three horsemen halted, whose steel he could see gleaming in the late afternoon sun. He thought a moment, chagrined and weary, studying his mount, and then decided to run for it; but as he wheeled his horse he found that he must have ridden past two more who were lying concealed in the dyke-side, and who, once he was passed, had scrambled on to the road to bar his way. Here was an end to the hope of flight; for the wide

dyke bordering the road on either side without any "take-off" made a rush across country impossible. But alert and resourceful, he covered his wheel about by acting as if his horse had shied, and pulling up to a foot-pace he approached the main band with an open look, smiling, thinking he might by free manners and effrontery win through without question. The men were every one well armed, but only the leader, a one-eyed man in whom Sir Edward's servant after some hesitation and with infinite astonishment recognized Mr. Verschoye's steward, was equipped like a soldier. This droll had furnished himself out with an old buff coat, and an iron back and breast, and had clapped a "pot" or headpiece on his skull which being too big for him hung awkwardly askew. He had further girded on an extravagantly long sword which, even on the mild old nag he bestrode, was more than he could handle. Altogether, he presented an appearance something between a bully of Alsatia and a guy ready for Bartholomew Fair.

He it was who summoning up a terrible voice, imitated from his master, ordered the oncomer to stand, and then demanded whither he was bound. The messenger answered, to Sir Edward Morvan's, adding carelessly that he had been to attend the market of a distant town. But the other frowning prodigiously began to vapour and talk big, saying that Sir Edward was a foul malignant, full of factious designs and immodesty, whom well-affected men were

about to purge from that honest part of England, since he was naught but a riotous and drunken cavalier and dammy, lewd and a swearer, a man vastly insufficient and scandalous, who lacked healing and savoury counsel. When he had harangued in this style for some minutes, he suddenly threw up his arm, whereupon the two men behind came down the road at a canter, and the messenger found himself hemmed in.

"Give up what you are carrying", snarled the leader seizing the servant's bridle. "Expand, produce, cough it up. In the market you come from there's a king sitting on rotten eggs. The man Morvan is one of them, and you are even now carrying to him messages for the disordering of this peaceable country, which I command you in the Parliament's name to surrender."

The intrepid messenger protested that he carried nothing; and seeing that he must fight, he suddenly pressed his knees on his horse and rode smash against a big hulking fellow, whose small pole-axe, which hung in a ribbon tied about the wrist, he snatched before the other could recover from the shock, and then turning about he reached the one-eyed leader such a swinging blow on the pate that if it had not been for the steel cap he wore his head must have been cleft. As it was, the knock fetched him off his horse into the mud. Seeing one of them down, the messenger laid about him with such fury that had the road been wider, as he was so much a better horseman than

any of his assailants, he might have got clean off. But the narrowness of the road and the wide stream on each side gave them the advantage, and after a sharp tussle, in which one got a desperate wound in the side, they closed up and secured the messenger, whom they succeeded in mastering at last only by their numbers and the bad ground. Seeing that the fight was over, the one-eyed captain, who had meanwhile been sitting ruefully by the waterside bathing his head and trying to collect his wits, hoisted himself into the saddle and gave the order to march. And as they marched, what must the worthy captain do to hearten them after the conflict but break out into various prayers and ejaculations, of the kind used by the precisians, for the mercy vouchsafed; and then struck up a psalm which he sang violently through the nose; all by way of convincing the prisoner, if by any chance he should escape, that he had been captured by one who belonged to the party of the Saints in the Parliament army; though in truth the other was far too shrewd to be taken in by this impudent travesty of those stern and godly men.

After a sufficiently long march, variegated by this kind of thing, and by halts while the pious captain drank freely of strong waters to keep, as he explained, his head from swimming with obscene vapours, they drew up to a cottage, standing very lonely in a wood, which the prisoner, who knew every yard of the country, recognized as being on that old estate

of Sir Thomas Foulkes which now of course belonged to Mr. Verschoyle through his wife. The house was uninhabited and almost bare; but the captain, kicking the door open, swaggered in with a great bustle, sat himself on the only stool, and clapping his sword on the table glared round him ferociously, while two men brought in the prisoner and the others laid the fellow who had been hurt in a corner. Then, after telling the captive, whom he kept standing before him sorely bound, that he had a mind to hang him up forthwith, he once more ordered him to declare where he came from, and to give up the letters he carried. The man however persisted in denying that he carried papers, and immediately they began to search him; but nothing at all could be found. Matters being thus at a stand, Mr. Verschoyle's captain shouted that he was too old a bird to be cozened, and directed that the prisoner's fingers should be burnt with match. But the messenger, although he suffered atrocious pain, held dauntlessly to what he had said. The captain seeing him thus firm, and being terrified to return home empty-handed, fell into a miserable blasphemous passion strangely at variance with his late psalm-singing, and roared out to twist a rope tight round the prisoner's head, swearing that he was resolved to make him know his master, and what he might trust to if he did not speedily confess. Then at last, after holding out till he was utterly crushed by pain and almost delirious, the messenger shewed

where the letters were cunningly hid in a double-lining of his sleeve; but no sooner had the agony ceased than he seemed ashamed of what he had done, and though they renewed the match-burning twice, and also tortured him abominably with water, not all the threats in the world could force him to give any further information. So, after spending some time at this business, the captain finally was fain to be satisfied with what he had got, and rode off in the darkness, leaving the messenger in charge of two louts who sat all night sotting together, but always wide awake enough to prevent any move to escape, even if the prisoner, who lay half dead, had been in any condition to attempt it. And before the next day was over, the man had been carried miles and miles to the north, and the letters were safe in Verschoyle's hands, who used them to elaborate his snares.

IV

This very morning, the most perfect of that perfect season, Morvan riding along heedlessly, now singing, now smiling out good-humouredly at the fair-lighted day, passed over, all unsuspecting, that part of the road where his messenger had been waylaid some weeks before. He was annoyed, as much as he could be in his beatific state—lying, as it were, dulled by love's drowsy medicine—about the messenger's mis-carriage, and grumbled now and then without con-

viction at the stupidity which he supposed had led the man to be taken by the Roundheads. But he had fallen of late, as we have seen, into such a contempt of Mr. Verschoyle that it never came into his mind to look for that hand in the business. He did not perceive, he was really perhaps with all his handsome audacity and physical gifts too stupid to perceive, that Verschoyle was not at all a man like himself, or governed by the motives of his generation; but rather a survival from the reign of Elizabeth and the early years of James, with all the peculiar subtilities, refinings, and roundabout methods of those times. A man too having in him the spirit of that large body of men in Elizabeth's time whose horror of the violent sins—murder, ravage, piracy,—was perfunctory and as it were spectacular; while in their breasts was a very real ferocity, in its essence barbaric and of the Middle Age, though softened and polished in a thousand ways and subdued to the ends in view: and with that, an almost complete freedom from harassing trammels of conscience, and a distinct preference for considering the fortunes of the soul as vague and ! matter for scholastic disputation, while the fortunes of the body were to be zealously pursued with unrelenting activity. Had Sir Edward estimated Verschoyle aright, he would have kept his eye upon all sorts of covers expecting him to emerge: he would have been most on his guard when he found the other vacant, senile, mildly foolish. But Verschoyle had always

been taken by Morvan for a frantic beast who tore from people whatever of theirs he wanted; yet one whose roar you might hear, and whom you might descry so to speak afar off bounding on his prey, however little you could do to arrest the onset. At present, none too soon! the teeth of the beast seemed to have fallen, his fire dying, almost extinct; the frantic beast was become, in fact, now happily at last so insignificant, so little to be reckoned with, that Morvan as he turned in at the gate to-day, perceiving the gaunt black figure prowling in the churchyard, waved a recognition with an air of scornful tolerance.

It is so hard for the young to rate at their due value the powers of the old! Morvan, seeing the old man so weary, so unwary, so trembling and incurious, had almost allayed even the fears of Paola, who, however, as she owed them to numberless stronger experiences, could not be induced entirely to forget. Still, for all that, she was happy now and content with an immense wide happiness she had not known since her marriage; and when Sir Edward, his horse comfortably stalled, strolled out of the house on to the long lawn, his heart followed his eyes and lingered upon the exquisite picture she made in the distance as she stood under a blossoming almond tree, wearing a painted calico gown and white hood—graciously lovely, buoyant, full of laughter, fragrant, delicate, and young as the primroses, hyacinths, daffodils, blue violets she cherished there. These long white days,

veritable holidays, which she watched drop into darkness one by one as threaded crystals into well-water, she had arrived never to regret;—looking forward rather with a child-like expectation of indefinite felicity, and welcoming the gleam of the new jewel ere the ripple of the one just sunk had quite died away. Were not these hours to-day more suave, the sunshine over there on the old wall against which the flowers were opening more genial, than at the same time yesterday? And to-morrow surely would be fairer still. Anyhow, the blessed sweetness of wandering there together—yes, literally hand in hand, lingering over trifles, looking for nests in the hedges, playing a thousand childish pranks in mere youthful folly and high spirits—what was better in life than that? The shadow of age seemed exorcised from the garden, leaving nothing old save the grey old house which looked blandly on this spectacle of young love, as though it gathered a warmth from youthful merriment, blitheness, and frolic, of which it had seen so little. And the tyrant, the ogre, the demon, where was he? Banished too by some good fairy; perhaps still prowling coldly in the place of graves.

But the long happy day of love was over. The sun fell; the wind, rising, blew chill from the wolds; the birds, tired of their loves and quarrels, sought the nest; it was time to go in. They passed through the broad shadows, cast by the last rays of the sun upon the fine-shorn lawn, round to the front of the house, and

passing through the empty hall where a great fire blazed, made their way to a small wainscotted parlour which overlooked the terrace. Here too a fire was set, but the logs fallen together gave but a red glow on the hearth; and while they stood warming themselves the day gradually died from the windows, leaving the old room in that tender light when afternoon merges into evening. Then, after they had talked a little at random, saying tumultuously they knew not what, they fell into an intense silence, holding hands, gazing pensively into the fire. What was the use of speech? But Sir Edward, noticing a theorbo-lute leaning against a chair, took it up, and after pre-luding a little, sang these verses, which he had made in the time of their separation, to a sweet and plaintive air, composed probably by Henry Lawes, though it is not to be found in his *Ayres and Dialogues*:—

I wonder if the lovers of old time
Like me upon the smoke of love were fed;
When in their lady's praise they made a rhyme
Were they so drear and little comforted?
Absence and sighings are my palmer's share:
Love that sees not the lover is despair.

I pay with scorns the heat of the clear sun
Since that it falls in groves where she is not,
Young quires make music, but I will have none,
Since by them all her name hath been forgot.
Days wind to months, and months creep into years
But all my portion is disgusts and fears.

If the one hour that brings the patient moon
To hang in Heaven its little silver crook
I could but see her, then the nights were soon,
The days were early after that one look.
'Tis now the lover's anguish and complaint,
Which if endured for God would make a saint.

And then in a dying fall he sang low over again the
melancholy cadence:—

Absence and sighings are my palmer's share:
Love that sees not the lover is despair.

His voice was indistinct, trembling with love. As the last note faded and failed, he put down the lute and bending over Paola took her head between his hands and kissed her on the mouth. She rose with an indraw of breath like a sob, naive, pale; and in a burst of tenderness, of despairing passion, threw herself against him, pliant, powerless, mad with happiness, with adoration. He seized that delicate head which drooped upon him like a too-heavy flower; he breathed the odour of her hair, stammering meanwhile some words, feverish and incoherent. But as they clung together in a disordered insatiable embrace, losing themselves utterly, suddenly they heard a cough in the room.

They started apart and stared into the darkness. Who was it? The door was fast closed with a stock-lock, and they must have noticed any one coming from outside. However, before they could speak, they

heard a great clapping of hands together, with the voice of Mr. Verschoyle calling loudly for lights; and as the servant entered, there was revealed the old husband seated at a table, a velvet skull-cap on his head, and holding to his face a pomander-ball over which his eyes glittered on the two before him, who, amazed, were asking themselves uneasily how he had got in, and how long he had been there.

“That was a good song, Edward”, he called out cheerily, “a sweet ditty and well sung. Living here retired in a poor country-house, ’tis seldom our ears are refreshed with carols. There was parson”, he went on, broadening his accent like a rustic, “he used to give us a stave o’nights. But a’s gone, dead and gone; a was took off at Christian-tide come two years. A is a main loss is parson, a main sad loss; but a was not a man of God. There was no fervent prayer and savoury conference about parson. Should’s ha’ heard him read the Book of Sports in church o’Sundays afore the war came. He owed much to me which he forgot: till I put him here he was an old curate living on ten pound a year and unlawful marriages. A weak man, Edward, weak and deboshed, vastly lewd, given over to wenching and the devil. A had more bastards to his charge than any man in parish. He used to say he made a scruple about the ring-marriage, like a nonconformist divine. But like yourself, a was a rare hand at a song and talking bawdy, Edward,—that he was; thof his songs had

none of your fantastical French turns about them, and suited better with a tavern or play-house than a godly abode. Was't not so, madam?" he asked, looking straight as his wife.

She stood resting her elbow on the shelf above the fireplace, leaning her head on her hand, her other slim hand lying against her skirt, with that admirable dignity and unruffled demeanour she had always in reserve for trying situations.

"Sooth, sir," she answered, "my little knowledge of these matters I owe to you."

She said it in such a fine grave way that any one else but Verschoyle must have been disconcerted, and even he judged it convenient to give over his odious clowning and laments for a man whom all the country knew he had plagued out of existence. He called Morvan's attention to the pace of a horse led up and down on the terrace.

"Why dost leave us so early, Ned?" he cried hospitably. "The nights be warm and thou knowest the road. Here 'tis uncommon trist at night after you go. I wax old and am only good for the chimney-side, and my wife sighs and mutters charms and passes Popish stones through her fingers to put the black spot on us; and I go all of a dither, what with fear of Sathanas, and the ultimate fire, and the end of a life of sin, which must ever afflict the old age of the saints; thof your secure and sensual sinners may carouse to their coffin, and make a health of perdition. So we

continue till the night is near spent. We have conduct, but we lack revelry and songs. Why not tarry yet a little?’

Old as the man was, Morvan felt like knocking him down. In the few minutes this scene had been transacting, he had made up his mind that he must contrive, at whatever cost, the escape of Paola from the house of this monster, and fly with her over seas. But now, angry and bewildered, he could find for Verschoyle’s question only a dull reply.

“Because, sir”, he said fiercely, “I am resolved never to tarry in any man’s house who considers me an intruder.”

“Faith, then”, replied Mr. Verschoyle with a loud laugh, “I’m thinking you’ll deprive many of your company!” And with that, as he saw Sir Edward was bowing formally to Paola, he reached down a candlebranch from the sconce and preceded his guest to the courtyard, whither the horse had been led in. Morvan followed him in a passion of anger and hatred: wounded vanity never forgives, and the speech last uttered was the key, as it were, which locked finally from the outside the door of the chamber wherein all the injuries he had entertained from the same source were heaped up. His host stood on the threshold watching him while he mounted.

“It looks like a storm in the sky to-night”, he said. “God grant thee a good home-coming, Edward”. And as Sir Edward rode off without any reply, or even

Good-night, he turned back into the house singing in a strong trolling voice, most weird in so ancient a man:

Absence and sighings are my palmer's share:
Love that sees not the lover is despair.

V

The wind was rising as Morvan rode forth, clouds were rolling together, and some drops of rain began to fall. Once on the road, he started homeward at a brisk trot, pressing his animal a little so as to put as many miles as he could behind him ere the wind, which always in storms swept with great fury across that open land, had risen to its full force. But he had barely covered two miles when he noticed his horse grow sluggish under him, and with some dismay found that it was running lame. He dismounted, and felt tenderly all round the lame leg to discover where the mischief lay and if it might be remedied; but the horse, as he found, had picked up nothing in the hoof, and for anything less simple it was as good as useless to waste time in the darkness. What he did ascertain after a minute was that the horse, between its hurt and the wind and darkness, was grown too nervous to go forward unless it were led; so, as he cared not to return to Verschoyle's house for hospitality after his malevolent parting of just now with the squire, he resigned himself as cheerfully as he could to trudge

the twelve miles and more which lay between him and home. He made, however, but poor headway; and what with leaning against the wind, and trying to soothe the horse which started and shied at the least noise, he ran some risk, well as he knew the road, of breaking his neck in the obscurity, or at least of tumbling into one or other of the ditches full of water which bordered a good part of the route. Thus hindered, it was close on midnight when he drew near to the park gates.

For some miles he had observed a glare in the sky without giving himself much concern about it: some barn, doubtless, carelessly ordered, where a spark falling had been blown into flame by the great wind. But now that he was almost on the skirts of his park he made out that the fire must be pretty near his own house: a heavy smoke mingled with the scudding clouds, which were reddened by a great light whereof the palpitating centre seemed to be the mansion itself: the eastern lodge, perhaps, where a keeper dwelt, was in flames, or worse still! the stables. He would learn all about it, of course, when he reached a cottage hard by which served as a kind of gate-house, where he was used upon his return from journeys to hand over his horse. But when he did actually come up to the cottage, hoping to shelter there for a little, he found to his great astonishment that it was deserted, though the gates near at hand stood wide open. Somebody would pay for that, by Heaven!

—that was the last straw of an awkward day. And it was in a rousing temper that Sir Edward, wet, footsore, thirsty, his arm nearly wrenched off by holding a jibbing horse, tramped up the avenue, the boughs over his head souging and moaning in the storm.

The avenue was over a mile long. Morvan had advanced about two hundred yards when something white rushed at him from the bushes.

“Oh, Sir Edward! Sir Edward! Lo, now, Sir Edward!” —and the words dwindled to an incoherent wail.

He thought he recognized a maid-servant from the house, and inquired petulantly what was the matter with her.

“Oh, Sir Edward, sir, ’tis the soldiers, please you sir. Mr. Bates stood me here, and cautioned me not to let your honour go up to the house, for the soldiers were there all burning and firing.”

“Nay, clear thy noddle, thou silly little fool!” cried Morvan impatiently. “What soldiers? Are they the Roundheads?”

But this was more than the maid could say, and when she fell once more to “Oh, Sir Edward, please you, Sir Edward!” he brushed by her and went striding up towards the house whence there came now to his ears, notwithstanding the gale, a great noise of voices. He was pushing on rapidly, when at a bend of the avenue he ran sharp against Will Bates, his faithful body-servant, a sturdy man who had attended him

to the war. Bates was now moving cautiously towards the gate, followed by a stable-lad leading two horses on the grass border of the path.

“How is this, Bates?” exclaimed Morvan peremptorily. “Wherefore is all this noise?”

But Bates himself seemed alarmed. “For God’s sake, Sir Edward”, he said in a whisper, “get you to horse and let us be gone. ’Tis a party of dragoons from the King’s army. They summoned the house towards eight o’clock, and finding you was away, entered with great shouts and went about pillaging and firing, their officers never quelling them that I did see, but triumphing and rejoicing, and calling you a damnable traitor. So that all’s ruined. But they said ’t was your honour they was after, and when they caught you they would slaughter you, for that you was worse than the rebels, and served with the King to steal his secrets and then deserted, and that you was a what y’call and traitor. And I said that you was none, and they took me prisoner saying they would hang me up with my master, and so they put me in the little room over the stable, not knowing the trap in the floor. But I got out, and found Jock here, and took the two bays in the grass field and lay here to stop you, sir, for ’tis plain they mean your life.”

Morvan grew paler and paler as he listened. “I am no traitor”, he said sternly, “and I am going up to face them. Come you with me. Who is their commander?”

"Sir, I do not know. But two of their officers talking a little apart together under the window of the stable, I heard them say they had all their informations from old Mr. Verschoyle, and they took it ill he had given them the wrong hour for your home-coming.—Don't go up to the house, Sir Edward", said Bates imploringly; "prithee, let us be gone. 'Twill serve nothing to go up."

"Rot thee!" shouted Morvan furiously. "Get thee gone, with a murrain! Save thyself, trembler! Thou art as pitiful a coward as yon poor wench. Am I to see my house burn and stand here idle?"

But Bates never moved. "For my life, I value it no more than another man", he said simply. "If Sir Edward goes up, I will go too. But 'tis useless; all's one ruin. To-morrow they mean to fell the trees, and fetch the horses and cattle away. When I came down they were drinking and tobacconing in the stables; but they think you are on the road, and now as they have waited so long they will be spreading out to seize you. Mount now, Sir Edward, in God's name! or 'twill be too late. Nothing can be saved by your going up," said honest Bates, and took the freedom to push his master towards the horses. "There will be no persuasion, they'll not listen, they are mad to slaughter you. One of them swore they would cut yourself down afore they cut down your trees. Nay, sir, they may have missed me by this time, which will set them running; for they mean to hang me to-night,

and only waited till they caught you to finish us together."

While he was talking he had passed the bridle of the lame horse to the boy, and twisting a lock of his own horse's mane round his finger, stood looking anxiously at his master, ready to jump into the saddle when Sir Edward had led the way. But Sir Edward was reluctant, and stood without moving. He trusted Bates; he knew that if Bates turned his back on a burning house and assaulting soldiers affairs must be indeed at a desperate pass. But to stand by while his wide fair house was plundered and burned without striking a blow, to be branded shamefully as a traitor to the King in whose cause he had been wounded, to run away from the doom of a traitor without defending himself, without ramming the charge back in their teeth—ah, no, his nature revolted against that. But even while he stood there deliberating, the trample of horses, the clang of accoutrements, and the sharp words of command were heard further up the avenue.

"Blood, Sir Edward, 'tis too late!" whispered Bates lamentably. "Here they come!"

By instinct Morvan swung himself into the saddle. From the very first he had felt in his heart that the game was up. He breathed a deep malediction against the destroyers of his father's house, and the greybeard fiend whose machinations had rendered him homeless.

"Lead on, Will", he said. "Ride where you can".

The two horses moved with little noise over the turf, and then swerving out of the avenue struck into the plantations, guided by their riders without the least embarrassment or uncertainty through the tangle. Bates led and did all the marking and listening, for Sir Edward was so stunned and furious that he could bestow no care on the passages of his escape; and it was only the long-trained hand of the fine horseman, the rider of the great horse, apt at all the graces of *manège*, acting now as it were by habit, distinct from the rider's will, which cleverly steered the fretting mare over the rough ground. The soldiers, however, were already beating the plantations; one or two of them who had got drunk were calling out ribaldries against Sir Edward; and just as Bates skilfully brought up against a little opening in the hedge, the fugitives were detected by some troopers posted hard by. These immediately ordered them to halt and give the word, and getting no answer, fired almost at random into the darkness, calling loudly meanwhile for their mates to bring up a lantern, and railing out against Judas Iscariot, and the Puritanical traitor. But while they were groping, baffled by the thick night, Sir Edward and his man had pushed through the hedge, and taking the open, tore along blindly at a free gallop. The soldiers had no chance over that difficult country in the black night against two riders who had known every field from childhood. They followed gallantly; several plunged

horse and man into the dykes; three at least, encumbered with their heavy fighting gear, were drowned. A few more shouts were heard, a few more scattered shots, and then the pursuit was abandoned; and the two flying rode on unhindered till the dawn broke upon their haggard faces. A little after sunrise they arrived at a hut standing lonely on the moors in a hollow between hills. This was the end of the journey.

While Bates dismounted and set about making a fire, Sir Edward still sat his horse, overwhelmed, as it seemed, by his misfortunes. He knew he was guilty of no treason; yet here he was a runaway, proclaimed up and down England as a traitor, his goods seized, his house burned, and miles and miles from Paola, with all hope gone of rescuing her. As he thought of these things, he turned in his saddle and childishly shook his fist in the direction of Verschoyle's house.

"From to-day there is no quarter between you and me", he muttered. "Ten years if need be I'll pursue you, but I shall have you at last, God aid me!"

For the moment, however, there was nothing more exciting to be done than to lie concealed, and send Bates out to forage, who might pick up by the way some trustworthy information concerning the destruction which had fallen. And in effect before long Bates had cunningly established communications here and there, and from the news he brought in Sir Edward was able to piece together a story.

There could be no doubt he had been ruined by Mr.

Verschoyle. The Prince, finding his orders neglected and his letters unnoticed, was become angry and suspicious; and Mr. Verschoyle had succeeded, not only in conveying damaging reports to His Highness's ears, but had also fastened on Morvan many imprecise and black discredits, contrived to blast his integrity with Lord Digby, Legge, Ashburnham, Warwick, and others who were in the private counsels of the King. But there was one letter, above all else, which definitely lost Sir Edward with the Royalists. In this letter, written in cypher by Sir Richard Willis a few weeks after Morvan first came into the country, the writer, while strictly enjoining his correspondent to delay not his return to Newark, at the same time, very unfortunately as it turned out for the other, gave some tactical details of a sally which he was planning. Now this letter, having been warily trapped by Verschoyle's servants, and the express riding with it persuaded he had delivered the paper to none other than Sir Edward Morvan himself, was presently carried to a division of the Parliament army under Massey, together with the key of the cypher, which Morvan in the mazedness and insouciance of those blissful days had left lying about, and a servant in Verschoyle's pay had purloined. When Rupert defeated Massey's force at Ledbury, these papers among others found their way to the Commander-in-chief's own hands. The Prince disliked Sir Edward already, and was prepared to find in him all sorts of

treacheries since he knew him to be a friend of the Lords Goring and Wilmot, and of Daniel O'Neil; and when he reached Oxford early in May he did not measure his words in passionately denouncing Morvan before the King. The upshot was that a troop was detached to carry fire and sword against the traitor. It is said* that the commander of the party had orders to put Morvan to death on the place, and having taken his informations timed his attack for the hour when that one was usually returned home.

So if his horse had not gone lame he would now be dead of a shameful death, and unavenged. His ruin, as he gathered from the report of Bates, was well-nigh complete: the soldiers had carried away everything; his tenants had been intimidated and ordered not to pay their landlord any more rent; altogether, he was undone and his two sisters—fortunately with their aunt in Yorkshire when the soldiers came—were likely to beg their bread. Morvan, as he brooded over this disaster, was filled with rage against the Prince and the King's other advisers in this business, for their readiness to condemn him unheard. True, Morvan had been of the party amongst the King's followers against Prince Rupert, whom he regarded as a young foreigner battling mainly for his own hand; a soldier of fortune whose methods of warfare were questionable, and who had on his side all the broken rakes,

*) Memoirs relating to the Family of Morvan, vol. II (Privately printed, 1828).

the men of prey, and the low-fortuned nobility and gentry of the country,—in fact all those disorderly and refractory persons who brought dishonour on the King's arms and made the name of cavalier a byword for lewdness, and rapine, and swearing. He even went so far as to suspect the Prince of hiding a design to shoulder out the old King and set himself up instead. These opinions upon His Highness he had expressed pretty freely up and down, and Rupert was no doubt acquainted with them; hence it was reasonable enough that when the opportunity offered the King's nephew should shew no reluctance to rid himself of an avowed enemy. That was as far as Prince Rupert went; but leaving him aside, Morvan had been loyal to King Charles and his cause to the full measure. He had not only served at his own charge, but at the first setting up of the Royal standard he had brought a strong company into the field which as the war went on had been gradually dispersed. In common with many another man of his level serving in the Royal army, Sir Edward had taken the King's side more from sentiment than from any strong convictions as to the righteousness of the cause; and like many another man at all stages of the world, he found the justice of the cause strangely diminished by the harsh treatment he had suffered in his own person from its upholders. Still, for that cause he had fought even to shedding his blood: he might have got leave to travel, as many did at the beginning of the troubles; but he

had remained and taken the brunt, and now this was his reward! As a matter of fact, he had almost as many friends out for the Parliament as riding for the King; and in his present desperate fortunes, with his eagerness to get even, to assuage his soreness, to counteract his ruin, and above all, to lay a heavy retributive hand on that old vile rat and sorcerer Verschoyle, he was vastly disposed to revise his convictions, and to throw in his lot with those whom he no longer hesitated to consider as the honest party in the State.

Ultimately, that is what he made up his mind to do. Having first sounded some of his friends on the Parliament side to ascertain what welcome he might expect within their lines, he set forth one night attended by Bates, and notwithstanding some dangers and hindrances made a rapid journey to Oxford, which the New Model under Fairfax was at that time investing. When he presented himself at headquarters, being very sensitive to slights after his late trials and because of his present equivocal position, he found himself irritated and baffled by the general's reserved, frigid demeanour, wherein he seemed to detect a note of irony. But one or two of his friends who stood by during the interview assured him that his impression was wrong, that those dry sombre manners were ordinary with 'Black Tom', and that on the whole he had been received very honourably. Any how, whether that was the truth or not, Fairfax must at

least have thought well of his qualities as a soldier, for he had not been many days with the army before he was appointed to a rather important post. A few weeks later he drew his sword against the King in person at Naseby.

VI

In the Manuscript of Sir John Holdershaw which we follow, at that part corresponding to the place we have now reached are inserted various excerpts from the Royalist News-letters, Mercuries, and pamphlets, which leave no doubt that Sir Edward Morvan's defection was deeply resented by that party. Ever since Marston there had been a pretty constant trickling of officers and soldiers from the King to the Parliament, and the lapse of a man of Morvan's standing could hardly fail to draw many waverers in its wake. Beyond that, his action must have the worst effect upon those little squires and men of middling estate up and down the country, ostensibly for the King, but who watched the wind, and whose *lâchetés* have been covered over for us of a later day by the noble unswerving loyalty of the greatest part of the Cavaliers; just as on the opposite side the unquestionable religious fervour and conviction of a section of the Parliament army stands forth so conspicuously, that some of us are led to attribute to that army as a

whole a higher credit for godliness than perhaps it deserved.

But the writers against Morvan, to say the truth, somewhat over-reached themselves; for though their evident game was to prove that they were well rid of him, their violence revealed their mortification. They did not regulate their attacks by any sense of decency, but rather fell on with a brutal freedom, fleshing their pens, and howling. The result, as might be expected, is a body of writing incredibly scurrilous, noisy, and confused, floundering in all that bad taste and licentiousness of vituperation which really seem often the only things that count in political writings and speeches. Here, however, it is purposed to pluck but few weeds from all this garbage; basing ourselves upon the opinion of a gentleman who himself served the King without flinching to the end:—That to write invectives is more criminal than to err in eulogies. Our one great difficulty is the almost impossibility we are in to select among these indecencies so as to avoid shocking a fastidious age; and we take leave to premise that the specimens offered have been chosen rather because they are the least offensive than because they are the most witty—wit, alas! not being always inseparable from propriety, but on the contrary too often flourishing amid filth, as fair plants use to spring from the dung laid about their roots. Nay, so far are we here from the spirit of true wit, that perhaps the most regrettable feature of

those examples we are permitted by the aforesaid considerations to lay before the reader, is a dull, barbarous mood of contumely, fatal to those lighter graces which alone can render a malign way of writing tolerable.

For instance, one author, after railing scandalously at 'That notable hee-whore, who by his lewd embraces and chamberings with the rebels, hath dared, 'as we may say, to make the royal cause a cuckold', —thus bursts forth:

"Temples of Venus fall apart!

Ye bordelloes fall down!

The bawds have given up their trade

Since Morvan's on the town."

Another delivers a laboured assault in a long dull pamphlet entitled, "God's Deliverance from the Lousy; Exemplified in the Filthy, Accursed, and Poysonous Seditions and Treachery of Sir Ed. Morvan, Kt." From this wearisome compilation, which is full of lies, and among other fictions relates that Sir Edward, upon his reception by the Parliament forces, was stricken with a loathly disease, "Whereby his nose by "God's mercy is now clene gon", we take the following lines, in which all point seems to be sacrificed to heavy ferocity and dirtiness:

“That part which holds his wit and grace
 Is Morvan’s only pride;
 Lest we might think it was his face,
 He shewed us his backside.”

The best of them perhaps is a long catch called “Morvan’s—,” written, it is alleged, by “A Person of Honour now with his Ma...tie.” It is too gross to repeat. The reader, we are sure, has been holding his nose over this noisome paragraph, which nothing but a scrupulousness to present this narrative impartially could have persuaded us to pen.

But Mr. Verschoyle himself with equal fervour, if more decorously, drew a grave and sober pen against Sir Edward, writing, as soon as he was possessed of the particulars, with great secrecy to Sir Edward Nicholas who had long stood his friend:—

Much Honored Frend,

The Pleasure I gain from writing to You is dulled and tarnished by the heavy Matter I treat of wch a poysonous wind hath presently blown into mine eares. Sr. the newes of Sir Edward Morvan’s defection, who was my Neighbour, with Tyes of kindred to my Wife, has panged those Hid and Vital Parts wch truely I did think naught but the Cold Hand of Death himself could reach to. For I do conceive that those who from the first stirring of these troubles have stood with the Parliament, should end by

rangeing openly in the Field against the King, is what our sad Occasions (though bitterly) have learned us to endure: But that One who did enlist himselfe under the King's Standard, and as it were under the very shado and countenance of Maiestie, should now unsheath the Swoard against his Anointed Lord and Sovraine, is what I can find no mate of in Blacknesse since this most Cruel Unnatural War, and doth Drap in herse-like weeds the Pen of, Sir,

Your most affectionat Frend and humblest
Servaunt

Simon Verschoyle.

And when he considered his neighbourhood and familiarity with Sir Edward, and how that one had unhinged all his cunningly laid plans by stepping over to the Roundheads, instead of being taken and killed in his own house; when he reflected upon Morvan's constant visits of late, and how promptly and terribly the King's troops had come down; he thought it wisest to allay any suspicion which might be reflected from Morvan on himself, and to nullify any pretext the Royalists might seize from this affair to plunder him in the same way. Accordingly he departed from the neutral and temporizing policy he had hitherto pursued so far as to add to the foregoing letter this postscript:—

“Sir, I ask you to represent to His Maiestie's Favour (tho' God knows I am not beforehand in my Fortune)

that 3 sound hors goe with these to the Army, and Monyes for the Comfort and Maintenance of the Cause: Also 3 lusty Fellowes goe. Sr. I pray your Frenship to stand me in a Fayre light before His Maiestie."

But he had favourable relations with both parties: raging as he was at Morvan's escape, he thought it convenient to throw a plank between the knight's legs in the camp of his new friends; and so within a few days he wrote as follows to the Speaker of the House of Commons:—

Right Honourable,

One I am ashamed to call my Cosen and Neighbour, Sir Ed. Morvan I meane, hath of late so insinuated himself as to be carried to Your Armies. Sir, be vigilant lest Ye be by him Ensnared. Truely I doe think he is a spye. He hath been entertained in Yorks by Mr. Perigal, a most fierce Papist and Malignant, who is his Oncle, and careth not for staid Company, but lewd and roaring boys. I confesse I would be loath to see you receive a foyle by this deboshed drinking Cavalier, who for all his white eies and feignings is a true Castilian at hart. Sr. he strangely loves the Bottle, and I misdoubt me will join in your army with certain Merrie Roysterers (being a prime Favourite among Such, the same who have contrived his putting over to the Parliament) and thus sow poysonous tares of unrighteousness among the Godly

Field of Your Army.—Were my occasions to serve you matcht with my Desires, I must be even more than now I am

Your Honour's truely Grateful Humble Servaunt
Simon Verschoyle.

VII

What precise effect these letters had, or if they had any, cannot now be determined. But it is certain that Morvan was regarded unamiably by many of the Puritans: there are two letters of Whalley's, for instance, in which he is unmistakeably aimed at in bitter and discrediting terms. Still, for all that, he continued to serve with the New Model, and appears to have more than once distinguished himself, till the flight of the King and the capitulation of Oxford put an end to the war. In the troubled times that followed he took an active, though of course very subordinate part, and made himself useful to that party in the State with which certain of his friends, Sir Harry Vane amongst others, were identified. But he had never influence enough to get himself compensated out of the sequestered estates for the loss of his house, or—what he wanted much more—to obtain legal authority for the rooting out of old Verschoyle. In those days he lived very hard and meanly; for the King's troops had not only burned his house, but had ruined many holdings on the estate, and the tenants, being

encouraged by Mr. Verschoyle, who worked among them with a thousand wiles, gladly availed themselves of the excuse, which the unsettled state of the country made a sufficient one, that having been forbidden by the King to pay rent to Sir Edward Morvan they were no longer sure to whom rent should be paid.

They ended by paying nobody. And it is doubtless on account of his extreme poverty that the movements of Sir Edward about this time are so clouded. We lose sight of him more than once in the months that passed between the surrender of the King by the Scots and the outbreak of the second war. He seems to have had a lodging, or at least an address, in Milk Street, over against Maudlin Church; but we do not find in his obscure and tormented history any fact worth noticing till near the end of 1647, when he was a principal in a peculiarly unhappy sort of duel, the circumstances of which seem odd enough to deserve some particular relation in this place.

As he was seated one evening in an Ordinary, there entered a young gentleman who had been his greatest friend at the University, and who was now become one of those wild and dissolute spirits in the King's party whose exploits left that party as a whole accessible to the worst accusations of its enemies. This gentleman, perceiving Morvan, planted himself directly in face, called for wine, and began staring insolently, and making a thousand offensive gestures studied to affront the other opposite, who for his part paid

but little heed to these antics. When the wine was brought, the newcomer turns to a precise serious clergyman near him who was attentively reading in some papers, and "By your leave, Doctor," he calls out, "determine me by the Synod of Dort whether it is the greater sin to sit in a room colloquing with Judas Iscariot, or to" The clergyman, seeing that a disturbance was in the air, answered drily, and gathering up his papers left the house. Upon this the Cavalier, not to be baulked of his quarrel, rose with a clatter so as to draw the eyes of all men in the room, and strolling over to where Morvan was seated, he cocks his hat at him, calls him a cuckoldy ass, and asked him what he meant by sitting down while his betters were standing? Without waiting for more, Morvan got slowly to his feet and hit the speaker a damned blow in the mouth. And in their frenzy they were going to a bout of fisticuffs on the spot; but the drawers and some of the company pulling them apart, they caught up their cloaks and swords and stepped into the street, none offering to stay them, though all guessed the fierceness of the business they went upon.

Once outside, the two made their way doggedly and sullenly to the fields beyond the Pest-house. It was a rainy night, with a tearing wind, and a full moon, which shining forth at intervals through the tumultuous clouds gleamed on the pools and wet grass of the place. And, in effect, it was probably

owing to the condition of the ground that the contest after all was so brief, which otherwise might have been prolonged and hardly fought, for Morvan was no better at sword play than his opponent; who, however, unhappily slipping in the mud, almost fell on Morvan's point which pierced him through. When he found himself down, with Morvan clumsily bending over him, the wounded man raised himself on his hands and looked at the other very tenderly. "Buss me, Ned", says the poor heedless wretch, "for I think thou hast hurt me, lad, and I swear to God I loved thee better than any one all the time." Whereupon Morvan, weeping like a silly big child, careless of the danger he ran, took his friend up on his shoulders intending to make for his own lodging; but ere he had covered half the distance he was arrested with his dismal burthen. Whether the stricken cavalier recovered is uncertain; but from the somewhat considerable efforts which St. John, who was Morvan's friend over this matter, apparently had to make, notwithstanding his influence, ere he could extricate his client, it is to be feared that the poor foolish gentleman died. Still it is evident that this affair, however rigorously it may have been judged by some of the Puritans, did not stand in the way of Morvan's employment when the war broke out afresh, for he was undeniably in the field as a horse-captain under his old leader Fairfax at the capture of Maidstone.

Meanwhile, during those broken times, Mr. Ver-

schoyle had dwelt on his lands perfectly unmolested. He gathered his rents as usual; he was regular in paying his taxes; he had taken the Covenant, and laboriously improved his relations with the Parliament. Sheltered by the Presbyterians, and looked on with a certain favour even by the Independents in London, at home he grew more close, more mysterious, and on occasions more truculent than ever. To his wife he would guard a moody taciturnity for weeks together; though he did not choose to spare her his company at these seasons, but would sit with her sometimes for hours, glowering, and frowning, and mumbling, and harshly rebuking her if she tried to leave the chamber. At other times, with that fury which always possessed him because of his foiled vengeance upon Morvan, he would turn against his wife and cover her with insults which were no less stinging because they were indirect and veiled. He had a favourite song, beginning "I am a cuckold bold," full of low jests, and this he and his one-eyed steward would sit together bawling solemnly for half-an-hour on end, shewing a wonderful ingenuity in twisting Sir Edward's name into the verses, and appealing to Paola to applaud, as it were, the hits. The unfortunate lady gradually became such a slave to her fears that she was never able to pass a moment with him free from trepidation. If he spoke she awaited some reproach; every morsel that she ate she knew not but it was poisoned. One day when he had been extremely

violent and sour, wishing at length to draw his watch from his pocket to regulate his time, his wife thought he was going to pull out a pistol to kill her, and fell from her chair fainting. When he was abroad she could only sit for hours with a book on her lap which she would not even open, so discouraged was she!—wan, motionless, gazing afar off with a blank stare, holding a quaint flower to her cheek languidly. She went no more into the garden, neither in summer nor at autumn-tide, shrinking plaintively from that scene of her intensest joys and bitter sorrow.

VIII

The extraordinary and lamentable situation of Paola was not known to Morvan in all its details, but he knew more about it than Mr. Verschoyle suspected. Though he could not come into the country himself, he had trusty spies and sure intelligence. But rage as he might at what he heard, he could compass nothing against his enemy: Mr. Verschoyle was too strongly supported in London for Sir Edward's necessarily vague charges to prevail, and such charges, advanced as they had to be without any direct proof, did Morvan more harm than good. He would have been sensible of this himself, had not every new report of Paola's sad condition put all else out of his head save an iron purpose to deliver her by a bloody and

punitive deliverance, no matter what the consequences might be, so long as she was delivered. For he feared that Paola might even die between the cruel hands of her gaoler, like a young bird panting out its life in the clumsy grasp of a boy.

But at last, when despairing and maddened he had almost made up his mind to desert and attempt Verschoyle's house single-handed, he obtained, by a singular piece of good-luck, or rather, if we recollect the methods by which his own integrity had been blasted before the King, by a kind of wild justice, the very thing he needed to assist his aim. This was nothing less effective than the letter given some pages back which was written by Mr. Verschoyle to Sir Edward Nicholas, and which, having been sent by Nicholas to a certain nobleman, was again passed on, and was at last forgotten with other papers in a house in Wales, hurriedly abandoned, to fall into the hands of a Parliament troop commanded by a friend of Morvan's, who knew partly what Morvan had suffered from Verschoyle, his soreness and rancour, his restless impatience to be avenged. It was by the postscript of the letter that Verschoyle was undone: in face of such irrefutable evidence of malignancy there could be no more hesitation to prosecute the writer, who moreover added to his malignancy a particularly detestable kind of double-dealing. Nevertheless there was still some delay; for Morvan, who was bent upon attacking Verschoyle's house in person, could

not be spared from the blockade of Colchester, where he was indefatigable during the sick and rainy summer; and at last, it was the day after the town fell that Fairfax, whose good opinion he had secured by various acts of gallantry and discipline, gave him leave to detach half a troop, at the head of which he set forth grimly on his errand. It so happened that although Morvan, like Fairfax himself, for the rest, was of a "rational" temper, as it was called, most of the soldiers riding with him were zealots and fanatics of one kind or another, transported by various wild fancies, seraphical and notional, and full of a stubborn religious arrogance and intolerance.

It was on the fine afternoon of one of the earliest days of September that he drew near the familiar, and in spite of all! well-loved place. He was ready to forget the stern work he had come to do, as he gazed from a turn of the road at the house he had always preferred to his own or any other, standing now russet-toned and grey, so venerable, so sweetly quiet, so ineffably serene in the clear thin light. Just at the moment that the troopers wheeled in at the gate, Mr. Verschoyle was sitting down to dinner, finding himself to-day in an excellent humour with the world. He was cordial, even conciliating to Paola, with debonair gracious manners, engaging enough when he chose to give them play; and he awed into cringing silence the one-eyed knave who usually at this hour had a loose rein. But scarcely had they

begun the repast, than a young man, excited and panic-stricken, stood on the threshold.

Without interrupting himself in what he was saying to his wife, who attended dejectedly, Mr. Verschoyle made a sign to the steward to rise and learn the youth's message. The two whispered a minute at the end of the room, and then the steward came up to Verschoyle's chair, shewing a countenance perturbed and sallow.

"How now, whey-cheeks?" sang out his master, noticing his fearful look. "Why, what a troublesome thing is guilt! Have they come for thee at last?"

"May't please your honour", stammered the other, all of a shake, "'tis the soldiers in your noble honour's gate. 'Tis the soldiers that —'tis the soldiers—"

"'Tis the soldiers, 'tis the soldiers" repeated Mr. Verschoyle, mocking him. "They will surely hang thee, Abraham; that is in no doubt at all. Thou art the last of thy noble race. Sure (he went on scoffingly) I have heard thee talk sedition and hold most damnable invective speeches: I have heard them and I'll say them. I'll betray thee, Abraham,—yes, I'll give thee up. I have heard thee say thou didst hope to see the Roundheads tumbling in their blood, when some of their money should chink in thy pockets. Was it not so?—Nay, the truth is thou hast been at the wine. Where are these soldiers save in thy drunken fancy and yon fool's?"

"Nay, so please you sir, even as I speak you may

hear them". And in effect the trampling of many horses and the clatter of accoutrements were coming in plainly through the open windows.

Perceiving that he was for some reason or other evidently besieged, Mr. Verschoyle rose gravely from the table. "Since the soldiers encompass us", he said, "let us go forth to meet them."

But as he was passing down the room the steward in a frenzy of terror flung himself at his master's feet.

"Save me, save me!" he yelled. "Only you can save me. I have been an evil man, I have colloqued, I have had commerce with the devil, I have lain embraced by harlots. Here comes my last breathing hour, God ha' mercy! They will hang me if you'll not protect me, sir; they will tear out my bowels—yea, truly, they will rip me up."

Mr. Verschoyle spurned him with his foot as he might a whelp. "Get thee hence", he said contemptuously. And turning to Paola as they passed into the hall he added: "'Tis but an hour's madness in that poor mean fellow. He is no coward for the things of this world, but he sees hell-fire in a farthing rushlight. He was bred a Puritan."

By now some of the soldiers had entered the grassy court, and the great bell clanged harshly. This being followed by loud peremptory knocks, Mr. Verschoyle, who could not have offered any effectual resistance even if he had wished, ordered the doors to be thrown open. No sooner was this done, than

Morvan at once stepped into the hall. Completely armed, he had his steel cap on his head, and it was easy to see he had come there to bring trouble. But Mr. Verschoyle, standing large and gaunt and black before the hearth, chose to ignore his implacable demeanour.

"Welcome, Ned!" he cried with an emphatic cordiality, "thou art returned home at last. We have heard of thy prowesses. No part of the earth but is full of thy labours. What battles thou hast seen, what signal victories!"

For all answer Morvan bowed low to Paola, noting with grief and anger as he did so her emaciated frame and the almost spectral paleness of her visage. She on her side spoke no word, but merely bent her head slightly in acknowledgement of his salutation, and remained seated in a high-backed chair, resting her head upon her fragile hand. Morvan then looked straight at Verschoyle.

"My business, sir", he observed coldly, "is of an unpleasant nature, at least for you. My orders are to inform you that you are suspected to be a dangerous malignant, and to search your house. For that, I warrant you," he added insultingly, for he could hardly control his rage, "I'll not ask your leave — only taking care", said he, again looking at Paola to reassure her, "that the innocent shall not be confounded with the guilty."

About half-a-dozen troopers had by this time

followed their captain into the hall. Mr. Verschoyle stared at them a moment with a kind of bland wonder, rocking himself up and down in his big shoes. Then he blew a long whistling breath through his teeth.

“Hoity-toity, these be fine words”, he said; “vastly fine words. I protest I do love a round speech, sonorous and musical. But thou hast improved thyself in the army, Ned; thou hast plied thy book, man! How have they transformed thee? The next ignorant, sottish, ill-licked, impudent cub that I meet who’s no good but to shamle about and make eyes at the women, I’ll send him to the army. Truly, ’tis a better school for dunces than a university,—that I see, that I see. Hast thy search-warrant, lad?”

Morvan, outraged and indignant, curtly handed him the document. Mr. Verschoyle glancing through it saw that he was accused of sending horses and money to the Royal army, and otherwise comforting those in arms against the Parliament; his servants and tenants too were said to be deeply engaged. He saw further, that he was charged circumstantially with playing the traitor to the Parliament, and that Morvan was empowered to bring him in custody to London. There could be no doubt that the warrant was genuine; and with a feeling of uneasiness which he disguised perfectly he gave the paper back to Morvan.

“I question your authority”, he said boldly. “But that can stand over till later. There is naught of

treachery here; no, nor hidden either. Begin your search; I am small afraid."

Paying little attention to what he said, Morvan gave a few sharp orders, and the troopers scattered about the house striking their swords and the butts of their pistols against the wainscotting to discover monies or compromising papers concealed. Morvan left the hall to control the search, for it was not in the least his intention to have the house wrecked and plundered. Mr. Verschoyle too mounted the stairs and sat himself in the embrasure of a great window on the wide landing where the staircase turned, keeping always on his face a smile false and terrible. And Paola still remained moveless in the hall, resting her head on her hand.

While matters were at this tension, suddenly there arose a doleful wail or ululation which drifted in from the terrace, and softened by the walls, filled the rooms and corridors with sobs and miserable cries. It seemed as if the spirit of the place, rudely disturbed after peaceful years, and presaging some tremendous misfortune and downfall, was wandering disconsolate through the building with laments and long moans. But as a matter of fact, the disquieting rumour was due to the soldiers stationed outside, who, finding the waiting heavy, had started a religious service. Most of these men were Straddlingites, or as they were more commonly named, "Oh-Ho's", one of those numberless petty sects which flourished at the period

and found their most favourable ground in the army. Originally called by its popular name simply from a physical defect of the founder, Know-the-Lord Straddling, one of Harrison's captains—a defect which forced him when he rose to preach or pray at first to emit certain involuntary ejaculations, and cry out many times "Oh-ho, oh-ho!" accompanied by uncouth writhings,—the popular name indicated in a measure the ritual of the sect; for the cries and contortions of the afflicted man would after a while so disturb the nerves of his listeners that they could not do otherwise than fall to imitating him sympathetically, and wail "Oh-ho, oh-ho!" in their turn with all their might. And this was the ominous and melancholy sound which was now wafted in and floated sadly through the house, while Morvan's troopers relentlessly searched, and Mr. Verschoyle sat smiling, smiling, gazing blankly out of the window.

After about half-an-hour, Sir Edward tramped down the stairs. He was ghastly pale, but his eyes gleamed, and on his face was a look of unshakeable resolution. Mr. Verschoyle rose to meet him, gathering together all his formidable powers of intimidation.

"Well, honest soldier," he began jeeringly, "gallant Hector, noble swashbuckler, runaway Ned, brave warrior on women and the aged, have you nosed out any treason lurking in my walls?"

"No", answered Morvan briefly, "we have found nothing". Then seeing that the other was going to

“You took good care of that”, he added as an afterthought. “However, we know enough.”

“All you can know, Edward”, returned Mr. Verschoyle, speaking deliberately for the ears of the soldiers who now had gathered behind their leader up the stairs and on the first floor, “all you can know to my discredit is that I am a poor old man, bowed with age, who live here with no other wish than to finish out my few harmless dusty years in peace, far from all state tumults, and to be laid in a quiet grave.”

“Ay, we’ll give you that, brother”, retorted Morvan grimly, “even as we gave it to Sir Charles Lucas a few days since. I mean to have you shot.”

Mr. Verschoyle made a slight convulsive movement with his shoulder as if indeed a bullet had just struck him there, but otherwise he betrayed no surprise nor any emotion. “No, Edward”, he said with sorrowful dignity, “you will not do that. You will not slay an unarmed, defenceless, and grey man, who has offered no resistance to your search. I knew your father, Edward, and your grandfather; I knew you when you were a little boy. If you command this most bloodthirsty and unnatural act, I tell you solemnly you will rue it all the days of your life. Observe, the deed will not be on the heads of these honest fellows here whom you order to fire the shot (and I heartily forgive them!) but you will be the horrible murderer yourself—yea, as truly as if you sheathed your sword in my vitals. Think well on it, Edward;

commit not this black and horrid murder of a helpless old man”.

He might as well have called to the east wind to blow softer. “You burned my house”, answered Morvan sombrely; “you scandalised me before the King. You have betrayed the dearest pledges; you have fired and harried. You have hunted the poor man like a partridge on the mountains. You have brought about the ruin and loss of many lives. You are an execrable and satanical cozeners. Your lusts stink, your magics and bedevilments cry to Heaven. My conscience is clear for what I now do, and God judge between you and me. Not this country only, but all England will bless me for ridding it of such a monster.” And turning, he called the soldiers to attention.

But the corporal, leveller, fanatic, preacher and Straddlingite as he was, a man who had been some time before chosen an Agitator for his uncompromising root-and-branch principles, on this occasion took the freedom to interpose.

“Stay, sir”, he said familiarly to Morvan, “balance well what you do. Our warrant goes not to the spilling of this blood. Sooth, I know that this greybeard is a son of Belial, spuing forth rottenness from his mouth, and given over pertinently to destruction; but oh, consider you that he is old, his sojournings with rogues and strumpets termed, his toyings with his painted young concubine below stairs soured, his days of iniquity nigh ended. For what says Paul? Paul says,

That which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away. Not of all malignants do I speak as one who would spare them—nay, rather should they be smote with the edge of the sword, their kings utterly destroyed, and their hellish dunghill of filthy, beastly, Babylonish priests consumed by fire. But this malignant man is old, and old blood should have a dry death. Oh, if this man's days be evil, they are soon done; if his nights unruly, they are soon one black; and verily his latter end will be bitterness”.

This harangue, cast in the language, and spoken, or rather preached, in the tone they delighted in, had a marked effect on the soldiers. Sir Edward, noticing this, and fearing the scruples of the soldiers might even provoke them to mutiny, and his prey escape after his careful toils, endeavoured with considerable readiness of wit to move them in a contrary sense by a vivid appeal to their prejudices.

“Seize the sorcerer!” he shouted, “he has bewitched our worthy corporal. Now he casts his Popish spells on us. The change is about to reach us all; soon we shall be turned into mice and rats if he be not presently slain. All the country knows this miscreant puts on the shape of a bloody beast at night, and has devoured two-and-twenty children in that form. Would you have the devil among you in the shape of a large wolf, raging and tearing? I tell you he is a wizard, and a Papist, and an atheist. Out into the courtyard with him ere worse befall! See!” yelled Morvan pointing

excitedly, "Oh, God, see! — he is even now changing to a grey wolf."

The soldiers stared with dilated eyes, and thought they did really see some frightful transformation in process. Recklessly brave in the field, they were slaves to their terror of Popish spells, and witchcraft, and magical receipts. Willingly, and even eagerly, they formed up under Morvan's order to drag Mr. Verschoyle forth.

But he, stepping up to the corporal who stood between him and Morvan, laid his hand on the trooper's shoulder. "Stand by, friend", he said gently; "I am no drunkard and carnal man as thou dost fancy, but a precisian even as thyself, who follows sermons and prays in my family. The gentlewoman below stairs is indeed young, but of godly carriage, and truly my wife. I do set my face against the wicked railers and swearers and other lewd persons who persecute me for righteousness, even"—he said, raising his voice and pushing the corporal aside, "yea, even as this swearing, cursing, sottish knight of the blade here now".

And with that, fetching a spring swift and lithe as a tiger's, he leaped upon Morvan, with a force amazing in such an ancient man, and bore him to the ground—seizing him by the throat and face and throttling him with his great powerful hands. The soldiers threw themselves on him, and with immense difficulty mastered the terrible frantic creature who had now cast

off all self-control and struggled with them, striking and ravening, to get once more at Morvan, the hatred of years boiling in his head.

"What!" he roared, "You would slay me, and then steal my house and marry my wife? Ah no!—before God, no! Not till I have torn the false tongue from your throat. What Verschoyle has Verschoyle holds. I will not leave the earth till I have seen you dead."

The soldiers dragged him downstairs, struggling furiously. But Morvan, gasping for breath, outraged and shamed, was taken with such a devilish frenzy of passion that he thought if he did not now kill Verschoyle with his own hand, he would be cheated after all of the sweets of revenge. He ran down the stairs, and reaching across the shoulders of the troopers, clapped the nose of his pistol against the old man's breast. But the weapon snapped without exploding, whereupon he brought the butt down with a smash on Verschoyle's face. "I will lie in Hell for all eternity to be even with you", he said.

A soldier threw open the door leading out from the hall; and there was the court, placidly green and silver in the kind afternoon sun. Mr. Verschoyle, since he had taken the blow, had ceased to struggle, and stood amid his guards gaunt, sinister and inscrutable, with his bleeding face raised to the sky, or perhaps only to a stone set high near the roof on which had been carved long ago the punning motto: *Verschoyle's Keep Verschoyle Keeps*. Sir Edward and

another officer handed their carbines to a couple of troopers; and as it happened, Morvan being still too strangled with fury and excitement to get his voice, it was the cornet at last who gave the word. The soldiers fired and the old man fell lifeless.

How much of these dreadful scenes Paola had witnessed no one can tell. When Morvan went in search of her he found her still seated in the hall with her head resting on her hand, but she had swooned.

IX

In the event, when at length she was able to realize the sane wide spaces these harsh doings had opened about her life on all sides, it was not, astonishingly enough! relief that was her principal sensation. She felt gratefully, indeed, that the immediate stifling pressure of the tyrant was removed; that she was now able to breathe freely where before she had been suffocating; that she could go and come when she liked; that she was young and rich and free; but these pleasant impressions were blurred by the haunting conviction that her new state was unreal, that her terrible husband had but withdrawn himself for a little while, and would certainly come back whenever it suited his ends. This insensate fear invested all her actions with a certain indecision; upon everything she did there was an air of the make-

shift and temporary; she recoiled from any step decided and permanent, shadowed as she was by the dread of that gaunt irresistible form returning to take possession, to demand an account. Her very sleep was afflicted by shocking dreams in which he was constantly before her: now in the clinging ceremonies of the grave; anon in his habit as he lived, but with a green wound in his breast still bleeding; and always towering, threatening, terrifying, standing over her with a diabolic majesty, then crushing her down with his hands; till at last she would start up strangling, covered with sweat, feeling even after she was broad awake that the old man was there actually in the room, at her bedside. Such dreams as these, the intensified prolongations of her waking reveries, took away from her all desire to stir abroad and see the world, or otherwise to taste the advantages of her freedom. Any attempt at pleasure, she felt, would not come off happily; would be cursed, so to speak, in advance. Far better to stay at home, to change nothing in her mode of life, to traverse none of the old orders and measures—not to beat, in fine, against that still powerful and implacable will, but just to rest quiet and wait.

Morvan tried to disengage her from these gloomy apprehensions, but it was long ere his exertions met with any response; and in fact it may be said that never at any time did he succeed in quelling them altogether. Although towards the spring of 1650 she

at last consented to marry him, that too was still with the consciousness of an act provisional, desultory, an idle and temerarious catching at happiness which the unseen, horror-striking watcher did not approve of, and might at any time bring to a harrowing termination. It was not, either, that Paola regarded the circumstances of her husband's death with compunction, or instinctively shrank from Morvan as a guilty and blood-stained man. As far as her knowledge of the affair went, Mr. Verschoye's house had been attacked by soldiery; he had resisted, perhaps slain one or two, and had been slain himself in turn. Such events were become too common in England of late years to cause any special wonder. She thought of her husband's end as she might have thought had he fallen in the field of battle, and of Morvan's part in it as if he had commanded a regiment which had but done its duty and come off victorious. Sir Edward took every precaution not to disabuse her mind in its imperfect apprehension of those events, and never spoke with any particularity of the attack on the house.

Abating these clouds, which were wont indeed since their marriage to dwindle to a thin sun-coloured haze, the wedded pair ought to have been happy; the world smiled before them almost genially. Young, and lovers who, long separated, were now fortunately joined in the suavity of wedded love, rich, seated in one of the fairest estates in England, truly it seemed as if Fortune, having plagued them so long, had of

late grown ashamed of her persecutions, and turning benignant, was remorsefully loading them with compensating favours. The troubles which were shaking the country passed them by. Sir Edward was looked upon with favour by the leading spirits of the Republic, and was outside of all suspicion because of his prowesses against the Royalist armies, and his signal unkennelling of that notorious malignant and plotter old Mr. Verschoyle, of whose death he had rendered an acceptable account, which was perhaps the more eagerly received as there were more than one or two in the House who would have found themselves strangely embarrassed and uneasy if the old schemer had been carried alive to London. Vane the younger and Haslerig were special friends to Morvan, and willingly looked after his interests. To be sure he had his enemies, and he was disliked, among others, by Cromwell, who, it is said, distrusted him for changing his coat and gulping down the Covenant with such suspicious readiness, and who, after he became supreme, persistently refused to employ him in business of state; but for all that his credit was so good at the Protector's Council-table, that when, in time, the Major-Generals were let loose to fine and otherwise harass the country gentlemen whose loyalty to the government was questionable, he was left unmolested.

Yes, they had every reason to be happy, and no doubt in a measure they were so. The husband cer-

tainly was happier than he had ever been in his life. And Paola too would throw herself desperately on waves of love for days and days together, letting herself be drifted and swayed and lulled till her obsession, waning then and almost dying out, seemed to her as foolish as it did to her husband, and she arrived almost to forget the old man in his grave. For whatever her fancy might suggest, he *was* in his grave, deep down in the cold earth; of that there could be no question at all. The huge ugly body had been buried as that of a Popish and atheistical villain, not in the churchyard, but by Morvan's orders under a tree which stood at some distance from the consecrated plot. And at present inside the house there was little to remind one of its former owner. All those servants employed indoors and out who had clung to Mr. Verschoyle, and who had even borne a kind of love for him, or at least took a sort of low pride and delight in his brutalities and powers of chicane—and strangely enough! they made a good number—had fled to the four winds on that day of their master's downfall. None offered to stay these panic-stricken wretches; but Sir Edward beat the country relentlessly for the one-eyed steward whom he would have hanged up with pleasure had he caught him.

That one, however, had taken to his heels at the first bruit of violence, and by the time Mr. Verschoyle had been laid in earth, and the soldiers began to look round for the fugitive, he had put a good many miles

betwixt himself and the house. After various and surprising adventures, which probably would not interest and certainly would not edify the reader, he came at last to a town in Berkshire, where he settled ostensibly to the trade of a tailor, under the name of Everard. Now in the town where he found himself dwelt one Dr. Pordage, a man of beard and severity, the chiefest then in England of that sect known as the Behmenists. Into the sober family of the Doctor did our Everard force himself, pretending that he desired to be of their communion, and setting up a claim to rival Dr. Pordage himself in discerning spirits by the smell, with divers other deceptions of the sort. But in the end he embroiled the Doctor most lamentably by his pranks, bringing the reverend man to be accused of wantonness and familiarity with devils. For in truth, as the Doctor soon found to his dismay, Everard was nothing less than a most wily speller and sorcerer, who held active conversation with extremely savage dragons and devils. Besides that, he most heinously endeavoured to seduce and terrify the good Doctor by his damnable arts, appearing to him, it is credibly related, at one time as a fiery dragon as big as a room, and then suddenly changing to a pernicious fly or gnat which buzzed about the Doctor's face for above an hour, thus constraining him from learned meditations. Nor was this all. One morning the Pordage family were horrified to discover on the chimney-piece of their parlour the impression

of a coach drawn by tigers and lions, and seated in the coach a figure, a very lively image of the reverend Doctor himself, taking tobacco and embracing a madam; all obviously the handiwork of Satan. This, though alarming enough, might yet have been endured; but what was far graver, by his magic and snares Everard gradually turned the good Doctor to all manner of abominations, so that the excellent man's house became, while the spell worked, a harbourage for many of the deboshed sort to sit tippling, while he himself turned into an ordinary gamester at cards, sitting up and burning lights in the company of this Everard till two or three o'clock in the morning, to the intense scandal of the township. And one night in particular, the Doctor, having sat many hours with the nigromancer engaged in drinking wine, and playing mine host and the good fellow in a very beastly and disgusting fashion which suited not at all with his reverend hairs, must now, if you please, when the night was near done, begin to roar most lewdly, singing carnal songs and setting up to be one of your blades, which brought upon him a remarkable and fearful judgment. For he suddenly found himself in his bed without any knowledge of how he got there, all clothed, and having on a pair of boots with spurs which belonged to no one else but Everard; whose face, the light being now come, the Doctor, as he afterwards testified, descried nine times at his window, which was raised many feet from the ground,

pulling his forelock at him, and making various low and disparaging signs with his fingers. Upon these monstrous events, and the consequent indignation of the Doctor's wife, Everard was driven forth from the town, none heeding his contention that the Doctor in his cups had insisted upon trying on the boots and could not get them off again; and it is attested that after his departure the excellent Doctor at once regained the ways of decorum, to the great contentment of his pious family. As for the steward, his subsequent fortunes are uncertain; one can only form the blackest conjectures touching his occupations; but there is reason to believe he was among the riff-raff who joined the expedition of Venables to the West Indies and died of a flux in Jamaica.

But though Morvan had the luck to find his house itself cleared of those servants who might have proved hostile, or by their presence recalled unhappy memories, the peasants, on the other hand, rapidly became very irregular and troublesome. By a singular piece of misfortune, the death of Mr. Verschoyle was followed within a few weeks by an outbreak of fever in the cottages, by mortality among the cattle, by all those ills from which for years the estate had been free. In face of this distress the peasants turned mulish and unruly, and fervently wished their old landlord back again, whose death they confounded with that of King Charles, and held Sir Edward Morvan responsible for both. They would lounge in

the ale-house, or hang about the churchyard on Sundays, telling over with a sheepish pride Mr. Verschoyle's most dastardly exploits, and drawing malevolent and disloyal comparisons with the present owner. And the legend, the inevitable legend, began to gather about the old man's name. It was reported that on the night of his death, and for some nights after, the moon was covered with a shroud of a dismal and fearful texture, while a pool near the house where he used to be seen at twilight in converse with spirits stood three days the colour of blood to the amazement and terror of many. The sober and godly minister who (upheld by Morvan) now performed the duties of that parish, had a most difficult time of it. In vain he preached elaborate and learned discourses against Antinomianism; in vain he uprose searchingly against astrologers and witchcraft: his hearty words fell against stubborn and preoccupied ears. His parishioners had got it into their heads that old Mr. Verschoyle had been opposed to all clergy, and they had done better by following his ways than they ever expected to do again. As a matter of fact, Morvan was a far more liberal and easy landlord than Mr. Verschoyle had ever been; he had them tended in their sickness; he sent them wine and food and fire; but when all was done he found that his charities were accepted more as a compensation than a benefaction. The more he did for them the more they hated him. It would seem as if there were a secret method to govern these people, and

having that secret you might trample on them, you might treat them like dogs, and yet preserve their respect, obedience, and perhaps their affection; whereas, lacking the secret, though you lowered their rents, though you improved their holdings, though you covered them with favours, you would find in the end the same ingratitude, derision, and sullen implacability. For some time after his marriage Morvan used to make kindly visits to his tenants, bringing them gifts, and sitting patiently with those in pain. But he was not wanted; the sickness and misery increasing, notwithstanding his efforts, he was supposed to bring bad luck; and as he rode through the villages he was met with scowls and mutters, while a few of the most desperate would threateningly lay stones in their hands. And as frequently happens, those people, especially those women, who had been the worst treated by Mr. Verschoyle were now his boldest partizans. Even the gentle Paola, whose heart was wrung by the sufferings of these poor folk, going abroad on an errand of mercy, was not spared some insults; and a strapping black-eyed wench called Lizzie Mend, who was said to have lent herself to the old man's embraces, and—as Heaven knows Mr. Verschoyle never made any scruple of defrauding the labourer of the wages of sin—had gained little more by her complaisance than a rough mouth and a wet jacket,—well, what must this quean do but frighten Paola almost to death by daringly calling out

in her pillory voice the words "Murderess" and "Adulteress". The groom rode back and laid about him with his heavy whip which soon brought Lizzie Mend to her tears; and upon his return, being closely questioned by his master who had noticed his wife's perturbed air, the man with many apologies and begging-of-pardons told the whole story. Morvan was naturally enraged, and the happy-go-lucky damsel would have been dragged before the justice and whipped almost to death, had not this measure reached Paola's ears, who commanded that nothing of the kind should be done. But she went forth among the tenantry no more. Lizzie Mend, on the other hand, became a sort of popular heroine, and perambulated the country shewing her weals, which she maintained my lady herself had inflicted on her with a foreign-like scourge simply for calling out "God's rest to Mr. Verschoyle!" This lie took all the more because it had by this time become one of the grievances of the common people that Mr. Verschoyle's body had been cast rudely under a tree by soldiers instead of being laid in consecrated ground, and the unredressed injury to his corpse was reckoned against his widow.

The idol of a people is sometimes made out of the most unpromising materials: it would have astonished Mr. Verschoyle himself more than any one else to learn the reverence and affection with which his memory was cherished. His name was now become a defiant banner, which rallied the most various

and extravagant complaints. Had the silly people but known it, they might have done far better, they could have been far happier, with brighter opportunities and encouragement, under the government of Morvan than under their old landlord; but they would make no effort. Believing themselves under a curse, they became churlish and slovenly and unclean, and thus aggravated the evils which pressed upon them so sorely. All their energies were spent in railing against the present family; and if we make due allowance for the narrow circle of his fame, it can truly be said that in that age of unpopular men there was not a more unpopular man in England than Sir Edward Morvan. And what made the situation immensely worse, Morvan's own estate, the estate he had inherited from his father, having lacked for some years the direction of his own hand and lain open to Mr. Verschoyle's potent wiles and cajoleries, was become infected with the heresies of the neighbouring one. Often Sir Edward longed to go away and leave these perverse and ungrateful people to the unchained mercies of bailiff and steward; but since Cromwell's troopers had plucked the Parliament men out of their House, and especially after Cromwell himself became Protector, Morvan's hopes of state employment were shattered, and from a political point of view it became in the highest degree expedient for him to rest quietly on his lands.

To these grievous annoyances, and to the unnat-

ural narrowness of life, the restrictions and seclusion which grew out of them, should doubtless be ascribed the singular mental condition which Sir Edward Morvan developed about this time—manifesting itself by an inclination to choose for his favourite resting-place out of doors the tree just out of the churchyard at the roots of which Mr. Verschoyle's body had been laid. This habit, adopted at first perhaps in a mere angry spirit of bravado, provoked in him by hearing his old enemy's name and powers dinned constantly in his ears, and by the widespread belief that the dead man would not be content to rest there quietly and cold on his back while another sat in his place and watched his fire, became ere many months an uncontrollable impulse, a necessity of his very being; and he would linger for hours under the tree strangely entranced. It really seemed sometimes as if he were drawn there against his will, and even without his knowledge; for he would often start up from his meals, or in the middle of cheerful talk with his wife, and wander dreamily to the door; but no sooner did Paola lay her hand gently on his arm, and ask him with her fond smile on what business he went, than he would turn round with a sigh, apparently shake himself free from some hallucination, and forthwith returning to his place continue the talk as though it had not been broken off. But as time went on this melancholy obsession grew more and more marked, and the unhappy lady could not fail to consider it now with the

greatest distress. He would steal from her side at night, and go forth to stand by that unblessed grave for hours of wind and storm. What strange fascination led him there? It broke his sleep; he ate but little; he would answer vaguely with far-away looks: his spirit, one might think, was always by the tree even when his body was elsewhere. From a practical, healthy man, a soldier and sportsman, a man of good spirits and the open air, he had turned in a few months into a hesitating, haunted-looking dreamer, moody and distracted.

Oddly enough, the tree itself, sere and thunder-blasted as it was, quite dead long since as all supposed, began about this time to put forth blossoms and leaves, flourishing at first indeed only at the top; but as Morvan yielded more and more to his mournful fancy, and lengthened his stations by its side, it felt increasingly life slipping through all its boughs, and in less than six months it was completely robed with a dense and poisonous-looking foliage which fell not when the autumn winds stripped the other trees near by. Of course there must always have been some life remaining in the tree which the disturbance of the earth at its roots when the grave was dug had invigorated; but what had the worst effect on the superstitious peasants, and what is indeed inexplicable, was the uncommon—nay, unknown species of leaves wherewith it had covered itself in this resuscitation. Large, round, spongy, velvety leaves, thick,

clammy and soft to the touch, and when pressed or broken giving forth a putrid odour—such was the unfamiliar vesture of the tree, at which the peasants standing at a distance would gaze as long as they dared, and at the lonely figure so often beneath it. And the terrors daily increased. Zilpah Green, a woman of conduct, reported that she had seen between lights a huge unmistakable hand reach out of the clay and move gropingly, as if it searched for some one whom it meant to pull down with it into the grave. Ere long the opinion grew that the tree was bewitched and brought the direst misfortunes upon those who loitered near it; and once that opinion had taken hold, Sir Edward's sad musings were no longer spied upon even by the hardiest. But he, careless whether he were observed or not, used to stand by that ominous tree for hours in all weathers, till his patient wife, shaken with anxiety, would at length go out and lead him in from the damps of the grave-side and the dank umbrage of the tree, to the warm house and her warm embrace.

On top of all this there fell out towards the autumn of 1655 an extraordinary incident, which might well have been taken for a warning of the immense evils in store for that house. It chanced one evening as Sir Edward and his wife were at supper that her glance fell on his hand, whereupon she recoiled in horror.

"Where did you find that ring?" she exclaimed breathlessly, moved to the soul.

"What ring?"—Even as he spoke he looked down carelessly and incuriously at his fingers, and turned very pale.

There was a ring on his finger, and it was old Mr. Verschoyle's signet-ring. The ring was unmistakable. It was an unusual stone, carven with magical symbols, and had been given to Mr. Verschoyle by his "son", the youthful Elias Ashmole, out of gratitude for some instruction in divining by the Mosaical rods, and especially for the communication of secrets in the Rosycrucian faculty. Morvan gazed in a stupor at the ring for a minute, and then tried to pull it off; but it was as fast to his finger as though it had been moulded there.

"It must have been lying about the house and I slipped it on unawares", he said at last.

Paola assented, but neither of them believed this explanation. She knew that Mr. Verschoyle never laid by that ring, attributing to it various potent influences; while he remembered that it was still on the dead man's hand when he was laid in the grave, for a soldier had offered to remove it and had by Morvan himself been forbidden. Besides, how came it that a ring which fitted the thick finger of Verschoyle clung so tight to the slim finger of Morvan? The two looked heavily into each other's eyes with these unuttered thoughts, shaken by terror of the unknown, the inevitable.

"O my love, whatever happens I have you—you,

your own self"! cried Paola at length with a burst of tears, and they clasped each other in a long embrace of intolerable sadness and anguish. Nevertheless, even in face of this ghastly and harrowing accident, he could not resist stealing forth in the course of the night to keep his station by the grave.

The next day, after many trials, he found that the ring was so deeply imbedded in the flesh that if he would have it displaced the finger itself must be sacrificed. Henceforward he concealed his hand as if it bore some disgraceful stain, and he and his wife in their talks together were sedulous to avoid all allusion to the ring. But it fell out with them as may be observed in an affectionate family whereof one of the members is stricken with a lingering and fatal disease, when, although each takes infinite care to shun that subject, still the conversation against the will of all is constantly circling about the forbidden topic: each knows what the other is thinking as if he were speaking aloud, the sick person as well as the rest, and she and all are oppressed by abominable dolours, the more poignant because they are stifled.

But though the ring was ever in their thoughts, giving them the disquieting sensation that they were watched and threatened, and perhaps at the mercy of some pitiless invisible spirit, still, in the two or three months which followed its appearance they tasted intenser joys than any they had known since their marriage. The offence which was common to

both, and assured them that the menace hung over both alike; the conviction that if one were struck the other would fall too; the fear always lurking in their breasts when they sought their bed that they would never again see the day, or else see it in incalculable conditions of misery and prostration:—all this induced in them a pathetic mutual dependence, a dread of being separated or distinguished even in their sufferings; as two prisoners who have been taken and tried and sentenced together might come at last to feel, as they were being carted to the place of execution, all other hopes and fears swamped now in the ultimate great fear that ere their agony was ended one of them might be reprieved in spite of himself, and they would be cheated of dying together. These feelings, and an instinct which told them that their lives were blighted, that such happiness as they might snatch would be of the briefest, and some tremendous price of despair and tears exacted for it, led them to open their hearts to the transports of love with an abandon hardly to be understood by those whose lives are regular and content. Though it is true that Morvan still persisted in his visits to the grave, and that by the tyranny of this habit they were for some precious hours of each day necessarily separated, yet it falls to be remarked, that once his dismal watch completed, he emerged so to speak out of a cloud, shook off the morbid ugly fancies with the damp from his hair, and came to Paola with the utterance

and smile of a lover. The two grew so enhardied by this enduring tranquillity that they no longer thought seriously of going away: they were almost quite happy where they had always dreamed of being happy. The calamitous ring, even, lost some of its terrors in this time of passion and caress, and Morvan no longer troubled to conceal his hand when he was with Paola. —One lingers with complaisance over the last peaceable moments which were granted to this unhappy pair, and contemplates with especial assuagement any feeble and transient gleams of light which lay across the dusky life of the gentle and kind Paola, whose sufferings were so out of proportion to any faults she had committed during her brief, joyless, and baffled existence. The last days of the winter saw burst forth the germ of the evils which remain to be related, and in the procession of which there was never to be another interval of ease.

On a bleak and desolate evening in the beginning of March 1656, Paola was standing by the fire in that little wainscotted parlour where Sir Edward long ago had sung to her his love-song. The snow had been falling heavily for two days, and when her husband, whom she awaited, at last came in, his clothes and hair were covered with snow. He had been standing knee-deep by the grave; his eyes were not yet steady in the shine of the room; and there was a certain trembling indecision in his step. Warm and beautiful in the soft glow, Paola, glancing but carelessly from

where she stood, laughed out some gay reproof for his tardiness, and with her wonderfully graceful gesture held out her arms. Upon this, all snowy as he was, he drew near and bent over her, but just as he did that, he saw the smile swept out of her eyes and face, and leaping up in its place an unmistakable look of repulsion and terror.

Morvan drew back, stung to the heart. "I should have shaken off the snow—" And he was going on.

"Oh, no, no!" cried his wife. She rested her elbow on the chimney-piece and covered her eyes with her hand. "It is nothing, nothing at all", she said, breathing hard. "A stupid fancy. I thought—I was reminded—O God!" she broke off, slapping her hand down on the wood, "why am I so tormented?"

He thought she was unreasonable and capricious and rather childish; and as the look still rankled, he turned on his heel and left the room without more words, and mounted the stairs to his own closet. This chamber had two steps down to it placed inside the door, the door itself not being so high as some other ones in the house, but still quite high enough for a man of the average height to pass through it without stooping. Morvan himself had always gone in and out without taking heed, but to-night his forehead struck against the lintel.

"How extraordinary!" he thought, rubbing his forehead ruefully, yet with some amusement. 'I must be growing taller.'

And as soon as he had shifted his habit—his little flick of ill-temper now quite gone—he hastened downstairs, eager to relate this comical accident to his wife, and promising himself they would laugh merrily upon it. So, standing in the hall, he called with cheery intention: "Paola, Paola, come hither, sweetheart."

Something in the sound of his voice sent the blood running cold through his veins. Whose voice was that? Where had he heard it before?

Into the hall came his wife slowly and wearily, supporting herself as she moved against the wall, and shewing a countenance deadly white and panic-stricken. She gave a quick oblique glance at her husband, and then drew from her heart a sigh or rather groan of relief, though the suspicious and terrified look still clouded in her eyes.

"I thought I heard *him* call", she said faintly, almost in a whisper.

"Whose voice did you think you heard, dearest one?" He meant to ask this question soothingly, as you might question a feverish child about its fancies, but it came out so harsh, so arrogant, with such a note of devilish raillery comprehended in the sound of it, that he stood thunderstruck.

"Ah, I knew, I knew! Yes, it is his voice!" cried Paola, and with that she flung herself down at full length in a perfect ecstasy of fear and despair, and beat her head against the floor.

Morvan heard a servant stirring at his work in a

room near at hand, and hastening there, while he was still in the little dark passage which led to it, he called to the man to run for my lady's waiting-woman. With a clang, the servant dropped the vessel he was holding, and stared in the wildest amazement towards the passage whence the voice had come. Thereupon Morvan stepped out into the light, and the servant, recognizing the well-known figure, hastened away.

"I saw Sir Edward right enough", he said to the others when he had given his message, "but I could have sworn to God it was old Mr. Verschoyle that called me".

X

Alas, the change thus observed in the master of the house was no delusion of the senses, but the bitterest reality, miserable and appalling, and that night only at its beginning. As the months ran, the features and presence of the fated Morvan gradually changed by slow, but salient and terrible stages, to the appearance of the dead old man. Morvan's handsome face became sallow and leathery and wrinkled; his hair fell, leaving only some grey locks straggling to his shoulders; his hands grew large and coarse, and his frame increased in size. And what was infinitely disquieting, and even disgusting, these loathsome changes attacked his body sporadically: for several weeks he carried one hand large and thick, and the

other his own slender hand, — watching this day by day as it inflated; for over two months he stood on his own well-shaped foot, and on another much larger and broader; for nearly a year he found when he undressed himself, on one side of the body from the neck to the waist the flesh sane and firm, while on the other it was dry and shrivelled, coated with white hairs. Picture his emotions as he studied day by day the stealthy progress of his affliction! Perhaps the most perturbing detail of all, was the long white beard which swept over his breast. At first Morvan, loathing this abominable ensign more than almost all other changes, used to shave his face closely many times a day; but in a few hours, in the course of sleep, the white thing would grow and again be hanging down, till at last the punished man resigned himself to let it grow as might.

Indeed, the struggles of the poor stricken wretch against his fate were as terrible and pathetic as the fate itself. By a refinement of torture, his character and mental attributes were not altered with his body; his soul was mercilessly enabled to stand by, as it were, and mark the ravages of the change; and Morvan would sit for hours, leaning Verschoyle's face on Verschoyle's hands and moaning in Verschoyle's voice that he was still Morvan. No, he was not Verschoyle, he would insist to himself vehemently all day—he was utterly different; he was not domineering, rapacious, tyrannical; he had no dealings

with the devil; he was cheerful, merciful, eager for love and light, willing to give men their dues. And perhaps his character did in truth assert itself, and his mind regain somewhat of its health under its shameful housing; for when the bodily transformation declared itself more rigorously, he relinquished his visits to the graveside. Strangely enough, about this time too the tree began to die, as if that which nourished it was passing elsewhere—perishing slowly in its rank luxuriance from the top.

He took the custom to go to Paola's room when it was dark, when his figure would be obscured, although he knew that she shrank from his presence in excruciating anguish and dismay; and there he would utter to the half-fainting woman in Verschoyle's voice words which came from his own soul—making passionate appeals, begging her not to flee from him, to let him stay near her, for he was cold and lonely; imploring her to believe that, sick and weary and bewitched as he was, her lover was still there; endeavouring, in fact, to make the true accents of his soul heard from out of its monstrous prison of flesh. But for her, only that dread figure remained from which she recoiled in unutterable horror and woe, as she witnessed it speaking her husband's thoughts and particular phrases with the voice, the inflexion, the gesture of the dead. No, this was not her brave kind husband who sat now in the room, but a phantom agenced by the powers of evil: those old bones long

buried had disinterred themselves and stolen from their sepulchre. The sickness and revolts she experienced at his appearance would throw her into long fits, from which she would emerge haggard-eyed, undone, with flecks of blood upon her lips. The afflicted Morvan, fearing for her life, was fain at last to bend his head under the scourge, and perceiving that it was the will of the inexorable Fates that in his calamities he should be desolate, he put himself in her presence no more.

From that accursed house the servants aghast stole away on various pretences, and never returned. There were left but an Italian woman who had nursed the lady Paola and loved her as her own child, and an old, half-witted, dumb man who shuffled about the sinister corridors till nightfall, and then betook himself to the stable;—for even he rebelled when it came to a question of sleeping in the house. And the beautiful place, sorely neglected, took gradually an air of isolation and ruin. The stalls stood empty, for there was no one to care for the horses; the garden was become a wilderness; while within doors the rooms where the sun never entered waxed dusty and dank and sombre. For by this time neither Morvan nor his wife could bear the glare of day, and the few rooms in use had lights burning in them at all hours. A waft of decay and anxiety, of death—nay, of a death beyond the familiar corporal death, as if Death himself had come to preside and be housekeeper there,

exuded from the walls and tainted the atmosphere. For hours long a heavy stillness weighed on the house which seemed uninfluenced by sense or space or time, an illimitable stillness to which sound was not merely an antithesis, but in which any chance sound seemed indescribably single, alien, arising out of nothing, and having neither origin nor consequence in that underworld; and instead of falling, as sounds do, disturbingly through stillness, seemed here outside, beating against a burnished wall. If you can imagine a tower which has never a bell, standing in an arid, void, and sterile plain uninhabited for centuries, and that suddenly, in a minute lying amid the centuries, a bell tolls slowly thrice in the tower, reverberates, and expires in the waste; if you can imagine a ship moving through an enchanted sea which washes round her keel and bows and deck without wetting them; if you can imagine how the voices of the living sound to the listening dead: then you can form some idea of the suddenness, distinctness, the isolation of any noise in the vacant air of that house. So at intervals would strike dully against the silence a symptom of life, as detached from the general vacuity as to a man suspended by vindictive gods just outside this globe of earth might come the cries of those at work or play upon it—a pathetic ditty crooned in a voice that vainly tried to be steady: it was the nurse who thus endeavoured to soothe Paola with a song she used to sing to her little child in the cradle.

And one who might have wandered about the house day and night would have seen in a lower chamber, dusty and unkept, a white-bearded man, gloomy, and muttering to himself a crazy litany of curses and prayers, or resting his old wrinkled head exhausted and throbbing in his arms on the table; and above stairs a pale lady lying spent and still and nearly lifeless, or else torn with a passion of weeping.

Why did she tarry in that doomed, forsaken dwelling? Surely there were still for her, if not for the scourged and hedged-in man, the air, the birds, the sea; and far from here, Italy lay flowery and basking in the pleasant sun. Ah, pity her! She ever longed for her dear lost husband, and hoped the magic spells might yet be broken, and that suddenly, all in a minute! he would be there once more with his brave face to love her and to assuage her after these intolerable sorrows. And that old man who sat always in the house, who infected the house, and whose hand she felt as a physical weight on her breast, would be hurried out into the night and tempest and cold. No, she could not travel away and forget: how could she forget, wherever she might wander, that the old man was seated in the house poisoning the sweet familiar chambers, while her poor lonely husband was creeping outside in the chill airs, longing to be at home by her side, and beating with vain hands at the doors. In the feverish dreams which thronged her broken sleep he would

resurge, and solemnly enjoin her to wait for him. Therefore she lay there courageously and patiently, settled in her vague hopes, which after all kept her from dying of mere heart-break, and that chill sense of finality, of termination, of the outlets to life unredeemably beset and barred, which kills so many finely tempered spirits, so lamentably! And her hopes, after all, were not more monstrous and unreasonable than the calamity which gave them cause.—There came one night when as she lay on her bed she was so sure she heard his hands on the casements, and his voice outside crying to her to let him in, that she flung a white robe about her and descended. But as she entered the hall, suddenly she descried lurking in the shadows that gaunt black figure of the old man, whom she had escaped now for some months, and who began to cry out, "O Paola, my wife Paola, have pity—listen to me!"—words obviously of tenderness, but so deformed in the speaking that they seemed a mockery and jeer. The figure drew nearer, and Paola, sick and faint to the soul, frantically alarmed, dropped the lamp she held and fled away in the darkness with an unutterable panic and loathing, hearing as she regained her apartment a long, desolate, heart-rending wail from below which filled her ears for many a day afterwards, and spoiled her few pauses of perfectly restful sleep. And she realized that there were things in life more fearful and unnerving than death: the dead, after all, might hope to lie

untroubled in their desolate places. But if *That* came lovingly to her bedside?

Meanwhile, out in the sun-coloured world Oliver Protector ruled and died, and his battle-worn corpse was at length entombed with sumptuous if unimpressive pageantry. Now, his son carried without conviction an uneasy sovereignty. Already the clanging echoes of the war were dying out of earshot; already by alert listeners the bright scoffing laughter and gaillardise of the next court might be heard faintly chiming in the distance. But intelligence of these events hardly penetrated the walls of that house, which once would have been so patently stirred by the like; neither could stirring rumours lift the heavy shadows which encompassed the building, wafting out from their folds a cold noxious breath of mortality.

However, one visitor forced a way through those repelling shadows. In the beginning of 1659 that sickness known as the New Disease, which had been prowling for some time to and fro in England, came at last into that part of the country, broke into the house, and laid its blighting hand upon Paola's tired brow. Tended only by her loving nurse, she lay in a kind of trance, wasting away, longing exceedingly for death. Her few years had been so bitter for the young, gentle soul, and she was miserable, and haunted, and weary. Her hold on life, so frail already and uncertain, she felt now soothingly—by what blessed

drowsy physic?—becoming as the hours passed looser and more nerveless.

About the same time, the old creature who lived hidden among the shadows, and wandered from room to room at the other side of the house, was likewise stricken, and kept his bed.

The chamber he occupied had long ago been put into deep mourning, to compliment, as the usage was, a certain honourable guest bereaved of a wife or child; and by some insouciance this melancholy furniture had never been changed. The walls were hung with black draperies which fell from the ceiling to the oaken floor, and as they vacillated in the gusts of wind seemed agitated by hands behind them. The bed was an immense construction of ebony, with black covers and hangings—a lugubrious funeral couch of a kind common enough at the period among families of importance; and the chairs, antique, outworn, and incommode, were shrouded in black. The sombre effect was increased by the almost complete exclusion of daylight, which filtered with difficulty through a window of stained glass. All these dismal trappings had been left to rot, and some of them were falling to pieces from long neglect; and it was doubtless owing to this, and to the absence of wholesome light, that there lingered in the room a sickening odour of decay and corruption.

Here, then, the old man lay suffering and forlorn. He was abandoned by all. Lacking Morvan's bodily

features he could not attract, excite sympathy; lacking Verschoyle's brutal, indomitable spirit, he could not compel attendance through terror. The dumb servitor would come in the morning and cast down a parcel of faggots on the hearth; and then, as if the sadness and harrowing chill of the room struck intolerably even into his dull senses, he would shuffle away and return no more. And tossing wearily from dawn till evening, and through the long night waiting anxiously for the comfortless dawn, the friendless Morvan lay alone there in his loathed and hideous casing, lost and forsaken, with what thoughts to pass the hours! Feeble and racked with cough, he supplied the needs of his old body as he could, but most of the time he lay covered in the dark bed.

One night about eleven o'clock, when he had been sick like this for four days, with increasing weakness every day, he was sitting up gaunt and wretched in his bed supping a posset he had made shift to warm. As he sat there holding the bowl in his shrivelled hands, his ear caught the tramp of a horse on the terrace, and then the court bell rang with a loud reverberating peal, as bells are wont to echo in empty houses. By whose hand? To that silent accursed house, where no one ever came, what visitor had the hardihood to venture at that dead hour? Now the hands were on the great door; he could hear it creak open on its long disused hinges; and presently he distinguished a footstep on the stairs coming in the

direction of his room. Yes, there could be no doubt of that; and the old man lay with wildly beating heart, marking the steps draw nearer and nearer. They moved slowly and as if with difficulty; now and then there would be a pause, and then they would come on again; and to the old man there was something strangely familiar in the tread. At last the steps came up to the very door, and there was another pause. But not for long! The door opened, and into that hearse-like chamber, in front of the old man watching the door with dilated eyes, there stepped the young Sir Edward Morvan. He carried a short riding-sword, and was dressed very elegantly, wearing a deep lace collar over which his fair hair fell in curls; but his eyes were hollow, his visage cadaverous, and on his breast was a great stain of blood as though he had been shot there. Watching this visitor from his bed in terror and bewilderment, Morvan (as we must call him) when his eyes lighted on the crimson splash, recalled from all the wounds he had seen where he had seen a stain just like that before: it was on Mr. Verschoyle's black robe, the day when he lay dead in the sunlight with his face to the sky.

The apparition glided noiselessly to the foot of the bed and stood there looking at the old man, not in anger, but rather with compassion and a great yearning. After they had regarded each other a little space,—“What brings you to this fatal house after so many years?” asked the old man; and if his accents

had indicated the turmoil of his mind the words would have come out tremblingly and broken. But the voice, as usual, travestied the mental state, and the question actually sounded sardonic, unfriendly, and combative.

The figure stretched out his arm. "Mr. Verschoyle", he said, "I have come for my soul". His tone was soft and mournful and even appealing, and stayed a little on the air after the words had fallen, like the vibration of a harp when the musician is departed.

"I am not Verschoyle", clamoured the other frantically; "I tell you I am not Verschoyle. Do you not know? Verschoyle was shot to death and laid beneath the tree. I know it—I know it—I saw him put in the ground—I have said it to myself a thousand times. I am not Verschoyle. Why do you vex the night with your unhallowed pacings? 'Tis you who are Verschoyle, and you stole my body and hid it away in the earth. I am Edward Morvan."

Again his voice belied his heart, turning these eager feverish words to derision and the bitterest irony. But the figure neither assented nor denied, nor shewed surprise or any emotion; only again raised his hand and repeated in his gentle tones:

"Mr. Verschoyle, I have come for my soul".

As these words were spoken, there was heard a little noise of hands feebly groping about the door of the chamber and striving to open it. The two in the room appeared to be listening intently, but neither stirred. On the young face was a look of

tranquil, even happy expectation; on the old, an indefinable minglement of hope, trepidation, and despair. Then the heavy door slowly fell open, and on the threshold stood Paola, holding a small carved silver lamp above her head. She was clothed in white, and her face, which bore the marks of long illness, gleamed strange and pale amid the black hair rolling loosely over her shoulders to her waist. No sooner did her eyes fall on the figure of the young man, than she put down the lamp and held out her hands with a wide amiable gesture, as if welcoming a long desired and long expected friend and lover, harnessed for her enlargement; and like a sudden light flashing across her shadowed and wasted features, came a look of wonder and content. She hastened her faltering steps through the wide room, till she stood by the side of the young man at the foot of the bed. But he, though his look upon her was kind and friendly, did not respond to her welcome otherwise than by a quaint frail smile, as people sometimes smile in dreams.

The old man on the bed regarded them meanwhile with a perturbed and lowering countenance. He was breathing hard, as the dying are seen to do in the supreme hour when the soul is struggling to go forth. And he began to speak.

"Stay with me, Paola", he said. "Go not down with yon dead man. Can you not see that he is dead? Ay, he has been long dead, long in the mould, ever since

the old King's time. He exists no more. 'Tis I who shelter under time, and marshal the order of existence. I have the hours and years at my beck. But he—his limbs have been buried and are powerless; time and the agitation of the world are but like water poured over his hands. He is naught and gone, but I live—I am I", he repeated, and peered at her with his tired and blunted eyes.

"Ah, not you!" she answered, weeping dreadfully. "You have pressed too hard on me. Life has been too wretched!" And thereupon she turned to the young man with the air of making at that minute a deliberate and final choice, and threw her arms about him, and shadowed him with her hair. But that one responded to her caress in no wise, save with the same thin and friendly smile.

"You are cold, my dear", she murmured, "and we have been apart a long time. The day is at hand. Let us hasten to be gone, while yet the moon shines."

And with a countenance wrapped in dream, not quite happy, indeed, and yet far from grief-stricken and hopeless, she drew gently her companion towards a little door in the wainscot which opened upon a flight of steps built, just there, into the outside wall. But even as they moved, the form on the bed was shaken with an appalling convulsion, as if it were spending itself in a struggle with the spirit it held imprisoned; and then the old body rolled out of the bed and stood there confronting them. It seemed

as if those three were a last time in presence, and engaged in an ultimate wrestle for mastery. For a minute they stood and gazed: then the old man, his face trembling with evil, advanced upon the two. But even as he came, they passed through the door out of his sight; and he was left staring with haggard eyes, triumphant, yet somehow broken and defeated, from the top of the steps into the darkness below.

* * * * *

The next morning the body of Paola, half covered with snow, was found by her faithful nurse at the foot of the steps. It was supposed that she had wandered to the dark room in her delirium, and having opened the little door, her senseless eyes had not noticed the void, and she had fallen headlong. But the woman was astonished to find, clasped tightly in the small dead hand, a lock of gold-like hair which she had never seen among the trinkets and keepsakes of her mistress.

By the orders of him who was called her husband, whose sickness, as it appeared, had suddenly left him, her grave was dug underneath the tree; for it was comely, he said, that she should be buried in the same enclosure as her husband, Sir Edward Morvan. Those who heard him—the waiting woman and the dumb man—refrained from questioning this curious speech, judging it to be some folded utterance of one who was scarcely human and who spoke to them out of another

world. With some difficulty a certain reckless man who lived far off was found to assist the old servant: in the twilight, between a crimson winter sun and the moon already up in the penitential evening sky, they bore her quickly; and at length the thin piteous body, which had been so vexed and tormented, was hidden out of sight in the earth,—her hard fate, in the end, relenting so far as to spare her the vanity of mourners' tears, and the grisly pomps of sepulture.

Sir Edward Morvan—or Mr. Verschoyle, as some in that country, seeing the terror he inspired, preferred to call him—survived in great seclusion till near the end of Charles the Second's reign, disappearing at last with his house in one of those frequent devastating fires which swept away so many stately houses of the Seventeenth century.

NOTICES OF THE LIFE OF
MRS. FLADD

NOTICES OF THE LIFE OF MRS. FLADD

THE life of the venerable Mrs. Fladd has long been a subject of legitimate curiosity in particular circles. Since the recent publication of the charming Memoir written by her daughter, Mrs. Grabthorn, this curiosity has undoubtedly been quickened and has taken a wider sweep; and therefore it is felt that no apology is needed for the following pages. At the same time, the present writer would deprecate criticism from readers of the aforesaid Memoir: he can have nothing to hope from a comparison with Mrs. Grabthorn's lively and irresponsible pen; the writing of the romancer and enthusiast always proving more attractive than that of the simple narrator. Certain events having come to my knowledge which were obscured or altogether ignored by Mrs. Grabthorn, I have thought it my duty to draw up a new disinterested sketch with them embodied. I am nevertheless conscious that if I sought popularity in the present age, my time might be better employed than upon the history of a lady respected for piety and works: here is no variety of adventures to entertain; in the calm anecdotes of such an existence there is little pasture for the frivolous. 'Tis to

Posterity I appeal,—not, surely, relying upon my own merits, but rather upon the increasing renown of Mrs. Fladd, under whose protecting banner I hope to sail confidently over the ocean of time, and drop at last into the sunset harbour of fame, with the said Posterity lustily cheering from the heights.

I

Caroline Catherine Fladd was born at Storrs-under-Hill. It is pleasant to recall that she was thus a co-citizen of the excellent and celebrated J. Ridley Tomkins, to whom Storrs-under-Hill, and the whole kingdom, owes the foundation of the public lavatory on the north side of the town. In after life she was wont to talk vaguely and a little at random of the situation of her parents, and from her conversation many inferred that her father enjoyed a certain wealth and importance. There was also a rumour, to which indeed her distinguished appearance lent a colour, and which I could never hear she discouraged, of her mother's descent by obscure ways from a great lord and magnate of the neighbourhood.* The truth is, however, that her parents were both staid decent people, and kept a public-house in the town. It was in this public-house, "The Black Boy", still standing

* Her daughter seems to adopt these statements; but Mrs. Grabthorn's account of her ancestry has no critical value (cf. Grab. IV-75 *et seq.*, which is in evident contradiction with II-33).

and visited by numerous pilgrims, that the subject of these pages passed her youth. Her parents were assiduous members of the Wesleyan Methodist connexion, and from her earliest years the child took the greatest delight in the entertainments and "picnics" organized by the chapel. "As a child", she has been heard to say in later years, "it was always my desire to marry a minister,—or at least", she used to add humourously, "a local preacher". A friend of her youth who happily still survives, Mrs. Trapp of West Ham, writes of this period: "Caroline's childhood will always remain fresh in my memory. Generally the first at the "Sunday-school, she was generally the first to leave, "and in common with the other children received a "prize every year. She was wonderfully demure and "obedient, discouraging any undue levity on the part "of her youthful companions. It was her use to keep "her eyes on the ground in the presence of her super- "iors; and as she grew older, this trait was particu- "larly noticeable in her intercourse with the opposite "sex. Indeed, her reputation for conduct was so "well established that I shall never forget how once, "during the visit of the Superintendent, the Rev. Mr. Flammock, Caroline sily pulled my hair, and upon "the natural scream that ensued, I was immediately "punished and disgraced before the minister for "pulling Caroline's." To this engaging account we will only add, that the child was indeed mother of the woman, and that the indications of character

revealed by the anecdote just related, may be taken as proper to Mrs. Fladd throughout her career.

In her eighteenth year she was joined in marriage to the elderly Mr. Fladd, and removed to Scratchmallow, where the rest of her life was to be spent. Mrs. Grabthorn would have us believe that her mother experienced a certain uneasiness in betrothing herself to a man who, it is implied, was socially inferior to his wife; but the fact that the first child of the virtuous pair was born six months after the wedding should allay such morose conjectures. The excellent Mr. Fladd was in fact neither more nor less than a commercial traveller whose occasions often called him to the "Black Boy" Inn, where he had seen and admired the youthful Caroline. Such, I say, had been his calling; but a few months after his marriage, urged by his wife, who dreaded for him the dangers of the road, he abandoned his employments altogether, and determining to devote himself henceforth exclusively to the delights of the family, he hired a wide decent house just off the High Street in Scratchmallow.

Their union was destined to last only twelve years; but though it might not be termed precisely happy, it was certainly blessed, and filled with magnificent opportunities for Mr. Fladd to improve himself, and to set a bridle on his unruly passions. His wife indeed bore him four children; but while thus accurately fulfilling the duties of her state, she was careful to shew in a thousand ways that she set no undue store

on his conversation or his company. Caroline, it may be claimed, had received the sacrament of marriage with admirable prudence, and with a view to her own exigencies, rather than with any trifling desire to increase the felicity of her husband. And Mr. Fladd, in effect, was not long in learning to appreciate the treasure Providence had confided to him; so that he left his young wife entire liberty to follow her behests, only begging of her not to fatigue herself.

To tell the truth, life for some years after his marriage seemed to Mr. Fladd an affair of rambling up and down the stairs of a house bigger than he could get used to, jingling a bunch of keys in his trousers' pockets, and wondering at his wife. In fact, for Mr. Fladd, a man who had lived till near his fiftieth year a moving and various life, and suddenly now cut off from his long-cherished places, uses, and pleasures—the stir, the railways, the rencounters, the bargains, the posting, the chaff with barmaids and the servants of inns, something new always and exhilarating; or better still! as Mr. Fladd was wont to ponder with a pang of regret, the well-known face, the accustomed welcome, the recognized room:—well, for Mr. Fladd deprived of all this, as you might say, at a single blow, the days now seemed so long, the house, literally, so onerous, and in its aspects so stagnant, respectable, and cheerless, that this excellent though weak man, unable to entertain himself with his wife's ideals, began to seek unlawful excitements. At the

family meals, graced on hospitable days by guests congenial not to him but to Caroline, Mr. Fladd, to enliven what he had come to regard as a scene of vacant festivity, was wont to recourse with deplorable frequency to a square bottle set at his elbow; nor, as a pair of fine incensed eyes closely watching him made out, did he confine his endeavours to drink his spirits high with gin and water only to his meals. And as if such shameless debauchery were not enough, the obviously enthralled Mr. Fladd, still foolishly in pursuit of unhealthy excitement, must engage in disastrous speculations, venturing at first small sums which, as time went on, became larger and larger, upon what Mrs. Grabthorn terms the Chinese mines, but which a more rigorous exegesis determines to be the race-course. But perhaps the most nefarious, if the most interesting, of his enterprises was to compound and publish a medicinal pill; and he worked at this so maladroitly, so feverishly,—attacking the business too, as it verily seemed, with a certain irony and rancour,—that it should have been esteemed by his fellow-countrymen a special motion of that tutelar Providence who controls the fortunes of England, when at length, lacking adequate financial support, he was obliged to renounce the project.

Caroline's conduct during this time of trial was noble. She did not know about what we still prefer to call, following euphemistic Martha Grabthorn, the Chinese mines; but whenever she could, she

locked up the square bottle. She even carried devotion so far as to purchase one of the spurious chymical antidotes to drunkenness, and this remedy with delightful assurance she surreptitiously added to her husband's food. The vicious yet unhappy Mr. Fladd might have lived on very content for several years on the gin alone, but when it came to struggling against gin and antidotes at the same time he had little chance, and to the dosages at last he succumbed. So Caroline was left a widow with four children and harassed with debts, being then about thirty years old.

II

What a situation! the feeling reader must exclaim at this juncture.

Stay, O amiable reader, those benevolent transports of thine, while we hasten forward with the comfortable news that a merciful dispensation had already raised up one to protect the pious and afflicted widow, and to extricate her from her perplexities. It is, in fact, at this clouded moment in the life of Mrs. Fladd that the somewhat mysterious Lapsley, of whom Mrs. Grabthorn gives so narrow an account, definitely emerges.

Lapsley, that enigmatic, odd, self-secluded artist-painter, with veritable upspringings of genius in him which he could not always manage to get rendered

by his hands; a man who was at no pains to nurse or publish his talent, but rather considered with indifference and ironic coolness fame, titles, gold-medals, "fashionable" Royal-Academy-Paris-Salon portrait-painting, and all further valuables that men in general sweat and strive after; a man moreover who gave ear to the pernicious and damnable doctrine, that considering the little span of our life, the highest wisdom is not to fret it away, but rather to seize all the passing occasions of pleasure as they offer, studying only to anticipate, so as to shun, consequent disagreements and pain; avoiding, for the rest, introspection, and avoiding oh so carefully! the least reference to the opinions, or government by the criticism, of other people;—this dubious man, sardonic, bitter-mouthed, yet pleasant and somewhat cheerful withal, was perfectly well known in Scratchmallow, for he had built himself a studio in the neighbourhood of the town. He had chosen this situation so as to have constantly under his eyes the long slow-moving shadows which fell upon the hills towards sunset,—nowhere, as he used to think, so mystically, so wearily, so poignantly, and yet with such enchantment as here; filling the soul as it were at one breath with intolerable anguish and beatitude, a serious vision of Love going friendly with Death.

Had so unusual and altogether questionable an individual, not content with living some part of his time at Scratchmallow, taken it into his head to

meddle with the sedate, dull, orderly, burgher-life of the town, he must infallibly have caused the veriest havoc, and set the good citizens together by the ears; hence it is with relief we learn that he had scarcely any intercourse with the town at all. However, while Mr. Fladd was still to the fore, he had at least contrived an acquaintance with Caroline-Catherine, that remarkable woman seeming destined to the unexpected in life; and at the point we are now at their relations might be said to be intimate. And as we feel that here we are open to the shrugs of the incredulous, we are forced, by way of rendering the situation credible, to dwell with a precision quite foreign to our contained and sober pen, which delighteth in fine strokes of the spiritual alone, rather than in details of that pleasure which dies in the enjoying—nay, not only to dwell, but to insist upon the mere outside and carnal attractions of Mrs. Fladd.

She was, then, at this time a well-grown woman, disposed, it is true, to be fat, but with contours which were vastly pleasing. Her worst features decidedly were her hands, which were stumpy, plebeian, rapacious, and her best, perhaps, her hair, of a singular chestnut hue, extremely coarse, but waving and flowing like a mantle. Looking at her, it was easy for imaginations in disorder to conceive, that were she stripped naked before an easel she would offer to the painter wherewithal to take pains, at least from her neck down. And for her head too, there was

—as all who have examined with any care the two curious pastels by Lapsley, done about this period, will agree—a yearning, morbid, insatiate look in the eyes which must have saved the face from triviality and commonness. To be sure, it may be contended that this look was “read in”, as they say, by the artist to give a tone to his work; and to that of course one can only protest that the few other portraits we have of Lapsley’s are certainly veracious renderings of people he knew, and Heaven knows he knew Mrs. Fladd.

Indeed, the extent of his knowledge of her, and what, so to speak, it embraced, must ever remain a mystery; but at any rate it went far enough to leave one wondering that a town notably prurient and censorious refrained in this case from being scandalized. And it was not that Mrs. Fladd was a favorite at Scratchmallow, or that the town was inclined from interest to shut one eye to her *frasques* and not open the other: far from that! On the contrary, Mr. Fladd having died owing money right and left in the town, the townsfolk inconsiderately visited his misdeeds on his wife, and gave her the amount of her bills in oblique scowling glances whenever she took the air. Nay, even when she was enabled to open the bonnet-shop in the High Street, afterwards to become so widely known, through a gift—or as that word may shock the delicate, let us say a loan—from Lapsley, the town, feeling swindled, looked on with sullen

implacability at her efforts to retrieve herself. No higher eulogy therefore can be passed on Caroline's prudence than this, that while the town reproached her for bad paying, it never did for ill living. It may perhaps be that in the eyes of the townsmen the enormity of the one offence was so great as utterly to conceal any hint of another; or again, seeing the frequent visits of Lapsley to the forlorn widow, they may have applied a reasoning analogous to the subtle deduction of the godly Mr. Baxter—him, I mean, of Kidderminster who wrote *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*—that if there were any drinking of healths in Hell, the rich man would not have begged so hard for a drop of water. But however the citizens of Scratchmallow reasoned, or whatever they thought, their attitude at all events remains none the less extraordinary; for the relations of Lapsley and Mrs. Fladd were tormentingly ambiguous, and gave room for the widest conjectures.

Nor is it possible to evince that the character of Lapsley went for anything in compelling this reticence. The character of Lapsley, to tell the truth, was nothing less than awful in the town. At the time we speak of, his painting had little vogue, and such vogue as it had did not prevail to Scratchmallow. His very costume, his loose tie, the cut of his beard, seemed to mark him down as one experienced in the foreign world of sin, and a scoffer in the Holy Places. He even went so far in audacity and brutal ignoring

of respectable susceptibilities as to instal from time to time a handsome-looking young woman in his house; and the local carpenter was free to relate how he was one day invited cheerily and shamelessly by Lapsley into the studio, and there found a damsel sitting indifferently with only a loose scarf cast about her fine shoulders. Lapsley himself, at the rare times when he thought it convenient to allude to these visitors at all, used to call them, with reprehensible levity, his nieces, who, he said, aided him as models; but the men and women of Scratchmallow, happily ignorant of artistic jargon, and rightly deeming the assertion of kindred a vain subterfuge, pictured only how they would act themselves were they boxed up, two of opposite sex, in the same house day and night, and thereupon solemnly comminated the painter's lewdness and chambering with a virulence exasperated by deprivation. The parson of the parish (not to mention the ministers of the Free Congregations), did he find himself confronted with Lapsley in shops or other places of resort, withdrew in coy haste; and our excellent curate, the Rev. A. Lurky Slam, even felt himself bound to cross to the other side of the street when he saw the artist's recognizable figure threatening in the distance. And strange as it may appear, his frequent and long absences rather increased the scandal of his presence, the town regarding his sojourns abroad as unpardonable dissipations. Altogether, he had the distinction—dare we say, the

pleasure?—which so few in our drab times enjoy, to be pointed out by a community as a monster of wickedness.

And yet, even from the dawn of his intercourse with Mrs. Fladd, the town seemed to perceive in this man a revival of the sense of decency: his dress became less flagrant, his manners less harsh and contemptuous, and the “nieces”, or “models”, or whatever term a low buffoonery might employ to cover them, were entertained apparently no more. Nay, before a year was out, Scratchmallow, waxing more and more callous to the constant equivocal intercourse betwixt him and Mrs. Fladd, started a rumour that Mrs. Fladd had taken the painter up to reform him; and this was eagerly seized upon as an urbane explanation of a business which, if too nicely probed into, might have undesirable outcomings.

III

—But why, you will ask,—being now, I hope, intimately acquainted with the attitude of Scratchmallow,—why, you will naturally ask, do you say, *undesirable*? Have I not been led to infer (you will exclaim) that the burghers of Scratchmallow were free from culpable leniency and complaisance? Will you please to say on: yes or no?—

Well, I answer, yes *and* no. The burghers of Scratchmallow, courteous reader, were, above all,

men of cautious and penurious habit, and permitted themselves the exhilaration of refining, and vigorous clamouring for austerity in morals, only when this might be enjoyed without affecting their pockets. Now, Mrs. Fladd, as we have said, had opened a bonnet-shop; within eighteen months after her husband's death the debts he had left had been reduced to insignificance; Mrs. Fladd, in short, seemed likely to become a profitable customer. A campaign might drive her from the town, and as that was at present a consummation undesirable, it was better to decide there was nothing to campaign about—which after all, for anything anybody knew for certain, was the exact truth.

But whatever rumours were bruited up and down the streets of Scratchmallow, certain it is that Lapsley, if indeed they ever reached his ears, busied himself about them not at all, but continued as he had been going. Apparently he had taken the habit of Mrs. Fladd, while Mrs. Fladd undeniably was become utterly dependent on him, body and bones, down to her very thoughts. In her monotonous experience he was new: he had nothing to do with her really: it was an amazing piece of fortune to have met him: he was the kind of man that in the ordinary course of her life she would never have fallen in with. He revolutionized her.

To make this clearer, we must at this point, in the sacred cause of impartial history, extricate ourselves

finally from those honied attaching leaves which the filial piety of Mrs. Grabthorn has presented to the world. Those readers, therefore, who already possess the book of Mrs. Grabthorn, and do not care (it is their own loss, let me say it) to be at the expense of purchasing the present supplementary memoir, cannot do better than borrow it from one of their friends more happily (again let me say it) inspired, and making an interleaf in Mrs. Grabthorn's volume, copy thereon the suggestions which will be found in the next chapter.

IV

First of all, let us not feign to ignore that Mrs. Fladd—at this period of her life at any rate—was dull; she was stupid and narrow; even, comically enough, she had spasms of the prim. It is of course not unknown what acres and acres of vapidness and boredom and silliness a man will put up with in a woman if she be physically attractive; but it is remarkable, to say the least, that one of Lapsley's parts and character and interests should have endured for long together a woman so irritating, so maddening, as Mrs. Fladd, since he had not the terrible misfortune to be married to her. She was not merely what is called uncultivated,—she was worse: she was uneducated with all the uneducation of the dancing-school, and the governess twice a week for French, drawing,

and the piano, and the other mediocre "accomplishments", which only served to make her dissatisfied with her own class without making her fit for a better. When she read at all, it was a lurid detective-story with some such title as "Red Hand, or the Perjured Witness"; she could not distinguish between a painting and a chromo-lithograph, except that she preferred the latter; her love and knowledge of music was made manifest by a phonograph, set in the middle of her drawing-room for the entertainment of visitors, which reproduced, even more brassily if possible, brassy brass bands. After her marriage, which put her in an easy situation, when she found that the bankers' and solicitors' wives, into whose society she was eager to be assimilated, —young women who, having been brought up to amuse themselves, devised numberless employments, and did not quite know what to do with an idle woman who had been brought up to work and had not learned how to play—when it was made clear to her by the plainest ways that nobody wanted Mr. Fladd's wife for herself, unless she was able and meant to contribute to the general entertainment, she fell into a monstrous languishing state, neglecting her children, neglecting her house, spending long hours in bed, from which she rose when the day was half gone listless and acerb, as lazy and good-for-nothing a creature as wandered under Heaven. During the time she thus wasted in bed, she would study with avidity the unattractive details

of maladies printed in the newspapers, and at length, panic-stricken, persuading herself that she suffered from them all, she would drum up one after another all the doctors in the neighbourhood to her bedside—taking on, the strong healthy woman whom nature had intended for housemaids' work or other manual labour, the fickle airs of an invalid, to lend colour and interest to her drab and empty life. She was futile, thoughtless, and almost irresponsible, when she was not deceitful and purposely ill-tempered—building up on a pin-point grand quarrels, adroitly prepared, which lasted for hours, and ended in sulks. Poor Mr. Fladd, as we have already indicated in the first part, existed but to give effect to her incoherent and stupid caprices; and if he had not had his secret resources of gambling and the black-bottle, would positively have made a Roman end of it. Between her and him there were continual scenes, about everything, about nothing, for Mrs. Fladd's pleasure, her simple pleasure. On one occasion, because Mr. Fladd found the unaccustomed courage to cross her wishes in some trifle, and the resolution to ignore her anger and tears, she actually prepared at her leisure an elaborate comedy of suicide. Was it altogether a comedy? Worked up to a certain pitch of hysteria, she had in effect the project of attempting suicide; but she wanted her public. She even sent out invitations in the form of farewell letters, addressed to her friends and acquaintances. Some of these attended discreetly one summer evening

on the bridge just outside of Scratchmallow, intervened at an opportune moment, and led the desperate one back to the conjugal roof where, under the hostile or reproachful glances of many eyes plainly accusing him of the most scandalous tyranny, Mr. Fladd nervously assumed a joy which was not quite genuine, since he foresaw, poor creature! the scenes, the neurasthenic explosions, the nagging, the lies and the rest which were now going to begin again.

She interfered in her family sporadically, making as it were a veritable irruption for two or three days which disorganized without reorganizing the servants, and then for two or three months letting the household train along slip-slop as it liked amid endless waste and disorder; and these outbursts of hers, as you will easily believe if you recall the incident of the gin and the antidote, were seldom controlled by wisdom, or by anything save what a newspaper or a chance talk had half-an-hour before put into her vacant noddle. She had crises too of expenditure, squandering wickedly for the sake of squandering, with the recklessness of one unused to money suddenly put into possession of a good sum. Indeed, so far had she gone in this direction, that she had herself largely to thank for the debts Mr. Fladd left her to pay—or let us say, to get paid. And the result of these expenditures was depressing, even heart-rending. Of an odd Sunday she would take it into her head to go to the parish church clad in an expensive villainous-looking frock, and a dreadful,

crashing, unbecoming hat,—having in short for all the world the appearance of an abigail carrying awkwardly the cast gown of her mistress; and there she would sit pulling at her too-tight gloves, and perpetually touching her hair with her hand to shew off her dazzling inappropriate rings to the rest of the congregation. Then, after that one airing, the poor gaudy frock would be thrown aside into a wardrobe; and in the house there lay dozens of the glaring things, which had ceased to attract their owner almost as soon as they had ceased to be for sale.

Well, Lapsley changed all that. He filled the vacancy; he was most saliently there; and he was a man who usually had his own way when he took the trouble to get things as he wanted them. He saw possibilities in Mrs. Fladd, and as he intended to be much in her company he exerted himself to set her to rights, with the same deliberation he might have brought to the re-arranging of a light and spacious but jarringly furnished room in which he found he was to pass some time. It was not all so easy as it seems in the telling; it was not as if she offered then and there a flawless evenness of surface to the impression he wanted her to render. Still, as Caroline bent to him almost from the first with all the devotion her narrow little soul was capable of, he had not, at all events, in his task, however difficult it might be, to encounter the difficulty of active opposition. It was almost of her own motion, for instance, and simply

because he had come buffeting through her life like a reviving gale, that the doctors ceased to call; that she threw the medicine bottles out of window; that nine o'clock in the morning found her dressed and downstairs. And then, with female acquisitiveness she set herself to imitate, to adopt. Lapsley, finding her conversation stupid and trifling enough to make one weep, took the ground of ignoring that altogether, and used to launch out on subjects interesting to himself, not because there was anything to be gained by talking to her about them, but because by talking he could make them clear for his own mind; and she, open-eyed and open-mouthed, with the best will in the world would come on after him, slipping and scrambling dreadfully, understanding hardly a word, but realizing all the same, dimly and delightfully, hitherto undreamed-of opportunities in the world. That of course was merely passive; but positively and actively too, in dealing with some unbearable matters, Lapsley took her as it were by the shoulders and stood her in the path he meant her to walk. He stopped dead the mean gossiping anecdotes about her servants and neighbours: he all but checked her uncontrollable habit of lying to make herself interesting. Her costumes and ornaments he chastened and revised, arriving ultimately at a happy arrangement of loose flowing garments which clung to her like moving water, dissembling without disguising the perfection of her figure. And as for the bonnet shop

itself, was it not he who suggested that, and notwithstanding Mrs. Fladd's terrible rushes towards the flamboyant, piloted it so skilfully into the regions of originality and taste, that the carriages were to be seen five or six deep at the door of an afternoon,—people in the county coming at last, when it was an affair of bonnets and hats, practically to abandon London and Paris for Scratchmallow.

V

For all that, it cannot be denied that Mrs. Fladd was an apt pupil, and as some would think, an encouraging. Ere the second year of her tutelage had well gone round, she had faced and backed and turned herself so advantageously to the new aspects of life which came streaming round her, that whether by absorption, incumbition, assimilation, friction, or whatever else, she had the happiness at length, one may perhaps venture to say—supposing it permissible to use the word Art and all its noble implications in a very low sense, insolent certainly to those grave rare souls who have spent their patient lives striving for an infinite faultlessness; and duly remembering, that like many another up and down the world who pretends confidently to practise or criticise art, she had little more to sustain her pretention than glib arrogance and a merely ignoble curiosity—well, one may venture to say, keeping all that carefully before

one, that she stepped forth at length a perfect Art-product, and with a considerable if flimsy baggage, set up for a connoisseur. Of her master's talk in fact she had picked up enough to bring some of it forth again in her own diapason, and actually began to chatter fluently that insupportable jargon which characterizes everywhere the hangers-on of art; with, in sum, such well-contrived effects, that for what you could tell she had spent her life between Newlyn and Montmartre. It is true that she was slow to give vent to her pretentious dissertations, or rather almost altogether abstained from them, whenever Lapsley himself was in her neighbourhood; but his frequent absences, which became as time went on longer and longer, and were regarded by her, now that she had sensations practically innumerable to crowd days formerly so stagnant, empty, and degraded, with steadily increasing equanimity, gave her all sorts of chances. Of course she did not know, as she used to say to herself, as much about art and all that as Lapsley; but it would go hard if she could not domineer, in those subjects at least, over the rest of Scratch-mallow.

Then, gradually issuing from this position where she found herself, the great business of her life began to take shape. It was now that she resolved no longer to devote herself to the world, more than she was obliged to, as the mother of a family; and her children, to give her greater scope, or to put it another way,

and in fact as she put it herself, to enable them to develop their individualities, were bestowed in Continental seminaries. And so, after so many ups and downs, finding by the favour of fortune her foot resting, as it had never yet done since her marriage, upon something definite and solid, she was able to start off gallantly, and having once got into her stride, that obstinate pig-headedness which in old days had found its sole outlet in nagging her husband, and vapours, and whims, was the very quality which enabled her at present to keep up the pace. She startled the attendant, the astonished Scratchmallowites, looking on, honest souls! in the greatest marvel; she undoubtedly, as people say, "floored" them: Could this be that Mrs. Fladd (they seemed to be uneasily enquiring) whom we have seen and known and disapproved of so many years? And almost it might in truth be replied that it was not just simply Mrs. Fladd who thus set people at gaze: it was, as she was soon to let them know, no one less than Caroline Catherine Fladd, moving on under their very eyes through bewildering inflorescence and inflorescence to ultimate glorious anthesis. Seeing therefore how things were, it will not be difficult to realize that the decisive move, the shove, so to speak, needed to settle her for good and all on her pedestal, took the form of an invitation from Lady Northness, the well-known amateur, voyaging abroad on the hunt for brocades and other art treasures, who desired Mrs. Fladd to

accompany her, and point out the right things to purchase. Mrs. Fladd, you perceive, was become an authority.

VI

Looking at Mrs. Fladd where she was now, and remembering where not so long ago she had been, the town verily seemed to wake up one morning to the intelligence that a great woman honoured it with her residence. Mrs. Fladd's virtues and merits, bourgeoning out self-consciously and magnificently under the sunny conviction that she was a unique and exemplary character with a standard to set and live up to, had in truth, as time went on, become less and less negligible, and had ended by inducing in Scratch-mallow an attitude of respect strongly tinctured with awe. Here, for instance, was the rector, the Rev. Oldcart Bull, hinting with diffidence as he drank tea in Mrs. Fladd's parlour, that he was gathering materials to write her life. Here was that audacious young clergyman, the Rev. A. Lurky Slam, referring, not obscurely, in a sermon, to a distinguished lady who adorned by her virtues and animated by her wit a town critical and exacting, quick to detect the spurious. Here were the mayor and corporation reserving for Mrs. Fladd an honoured place at the municipal festivities. And all this but seven or eight years after her first meeting with Lapsley! Truly, Mrs. Fladd

must have been blind indeed had she been blind to her own greatness.

And as time went on, she began to question seriously whether after all Lapsley was to be allowed much credit for her wonderful development. Certainly, nobody else dreamed of allowing him any. In fact an opinion arose about this time in Scratchmallow, which has since pervaded pretty well through the world, that as far as the relations of Lapsley and Mrs. Fladd were in question, it was Mrs. Fladd who had been the instructor and Lapsley the disciple. What immensely helped on this persuasion was that such poor fame as Lapsley was ever to have, happened to be coincident with the beginnings of Mrs. Fladd's full-volumed renown: when she took her stand triumphant on her apex, he too stood, bored and indifferent, upon his ant-hill. In effect, certain organs of publicity had at length decided to print eulogies of the artist's exhibited work, thus shoving him as it were under the noses of the Scratchmallowites; and that perspicacious town, "critical, exacting, quick (to quote the impressive words of the Rev. A. Lurky Slam) to detect the spurious", was not long in making up its mind what line to take. "Honour", as the Mayor said forcibly for any one to hear,—“Honour”, said he, “where honour is due”. Here was a fame of more or less interest to the world at large to be imposed upon the right shoulders; quite unexpectedly, and to its great, though contained joy, Scratchmallow was put in the

honourable position of giving a tone to the world, and it was of the utmost importance that the tone should be (as the Mayor said again) in keeping with the best traditions of the town. Well, Scratchmallow knew Mrs. Fladd; even it may be said that it felt her; her actions departed from the norm of the town only as far as to astonish without repelling; her methods, like those of all vulgarizers—taking Mrs. Fladd as the vulgarizer of Lapsley, and using the word in its primitive signification—ran in frequented ways.

Lapsley, on the other hand, was known to Scratchmallow only from the outside, and considered with the acrid suspicion usually provoked by the mysterious and unusual. In Scratchmallow, at any rate, the Press of Great Britain was regarded with a reverence which amounted almost to simplicity, and not a soul in Scratchmallow could be got to believe that such a man as Lapsley was able all by himself to paint pictures considerable enough to be discussed by the Press of Great Britain. No, there was unquestionably something behind all that for those who were on the spot to see; and the undeniable fact, now vividly remembered, that while Lapsley had talked here and there for years in his rough offhand way of the merits of Mrs. Fladd, no inhabitant was to be found who had ever heard Mrs. Fladd speak of Lapsley's, could not prove other, as most thought, than an emphatic support of the conclusion Scratchmallow quickly came to. So, swayed by these adequate considera-

tions, and, it must be confessed, with some indignation rising against Lapsley, the town determined to act, and took counsel together. The Mayor, Mr. Pudge,* who was a Dissenter, and the Rector reconciled their differences in view of the importance of the occasion, and indited a letter to the local newspaper in which, without hampering themselves by any absolute statements, the writers denigrated Lapsley, urged the claims of Mrs. Fladd, and defecated the whole subject with an irresistible logic certain to convince the impartial reader, — and all readers were impartial in the Rector's and Mayor's sense, inasmuch as they were all partial to Mrs. Fladd.

What made this crusade—if that be not too big a word, implying more apparent movement and noisier zeal than there actually was—but what made it more feasible, was the utter indifference of Lapsley himself to their disputes and excitements, and his interminable absence from the town. He was rather sick at last of Scratchmallow; and for another and principal thing, Mrs. Fladd, in her present state, was become more than his conscience could stand. Her cock-sure way of giving forth her opinions on every subject under Heaven, the very inflexions of her voice, attempting to cover natural and therefore much pleasanter modulations, became to him as portentous and nerve-quaking as the Commander's steps to Don Juan.

*) Afterwards Sir Frank,

Looking at her, he thought drearily or impatiently, according to whether he was confused or angry, how much more preferable was dullness unadorned to dullness capering in frills. And at Scratchmallow his sin surged before him sombrely at every turn: but for him, he was forced to reflect as he saw the carriages before the bonnet-shop, as he read Mrs. Fladd's name in the papers, as he heard her silly second-hand opinions quoted on all sides—but for him she might have retained the native engaging form of her stupidity. When he was told that she had been persuaded to deliver a lecture, entitled "Art and Life", before attentive respectful dwellers in Scratchmallow and the country round about, presided over by the High Sheriff of the county, he meditated gloomily a retirement to the most rigorous monastery of the Carthusians. He could see her hauling down the Ruskins and the Hamertons for that lecture, pillaging them dreadfully, and afterwards with amazing effrontery (that, at all events, was the magnificent consoling feature of the whole sad business) hurling unassimilated indigestible chunks at the bewildered submissive heads beneath her. When in solitude he pictured that, his sin seemed greater than he could bear, and Scratchmallow, where necessarily it stalked in horrid panoply, wrapped as it were in a sheet with goutts of blood, and brandishing menaces, a place verily foretasting of the nether invisible world and by all means to be got away from. And being thus too much occupied

with searching balm of Gilead for the recovering of conscience to attend to Scratchmallow's judgment of himself and his works, he gave but a half-amused negligent heed to its attributions. Probably it never occurred to him that Scratchmallow's vastly ridiculous notions would expatiate beyond Scratchmallow; probably he could not imagine with what force wrong-headed opinions can traverse the world when they have, like powder to expel them forth, the precipitated wrong-headedness of a stubborn community. Any way, that is how the affair struck him out there in Algiers, where he now lived almost altogether, painting very little, and then only to seize phases of passionate white light with a hand less crafty by far than it had been among the shadowy English hills. Always fastidious and producing little, it was not long ere he laid aside his brush altogether.

Mrs. Fladd, meanwhile, immensely busy, summoned hither and thither an honoured guest, began on her side to think very naturally that if this was where she had managed to come out, Lapsley could not be for much in it, since it was obvious he had never envisaged for her such a consummation. She had, she sincerely felt, nobody to thank for it at all but Caroline Catherine Fladd, with her tact, her skill, with, as people said, her "push". To Lapsley she convinced herself little by little that she owed scarcely anything in the way of instruction; and in truth Lapsley's instructions had been administered so skilfully that it

would have needed a much more intelligent pupil than Mrs. Fladd to perceive that they were instructions. After all, as she reflected, the world judged that she was the great person and that Lapsley was mediocre; and was the greatest part of mankind likely to be wrong?

These very sensible considerations enabled her to accept and carry unblushingly the unanticipated competencies which Scratchmallow had now made up its mind to thrust upon her. The garment was there in which it was decreed she was to perambulate under admiring eyes; there it was, held out by the mayor and corporation, the rector, curate and the rest, brocaded and weighty, not the least in the world cut to her figure: but thus insistently offered by officials, by recognized authorities in the commonwealth, such as her forbears had cringed to and all her blood prompted her to respect, men whose homage shored up her self-assurance whenever that was inclined to wilt, she was not the woman to bend under it or to let it hang loose about her in awkward folds.

But really, in the event, when it came to the point, she did not find it a very long or difficult step from the conviction that she owed Lapsley nothing, to the belief that she had helped to paint his pictures. After all, she had talked to him while he was painting them. Besides, it must be remarked, as a circumstance which was likely to encourage her confidence, that Lapsley, who had never been behindhand in appre-

ciating her capabilities in the way of driving a bargain, so far above what he himself had been endued with, had often agreed to her request that she might interview on his behalf—or to put it better, since she was to have the gross share of the profits, on behalf of them both—the London picture-dealers; and in the reminiscences of these gentry a canvas of Lapsley's called up the corporeal presence, not of the artist himself, whom they did not know even by sight, but of a graceful, flowing, almost flaunting Mrs. Fladd, talking with studied tiredness an impressive jargon, and terribly exigent as to price. Well, if she sold the pictures and pocketed the proceeds, might she not be said to entangle herself by the subtlest of ties with their subsequent fortunes? Who but she could claim to have set them abroad in the world? And indeed the picture-dealers themselves, to whom the assertions of Scratchmallow persistently filtered, were not disinclined to give them a sort of credit. There was one case, even, where one of them, and not of the least practised, whose name however I may not mention, either made a big mistake, or what is more likely, deliberately adopted the contention of Scratchmallow; for Lapsley's painting, entitled "Autumn in the Hills", which was sold out of England by this dealer's good offices, is catalogued in a foreign gallery under the name of Mrs. Fladd.

VII

Although with the pictures, to be sure, Mrs. Fladd, as she lost sight for longer and longer spells of her artist, and ceased at length to connect with him altogether, stood yearly less and less in any explainable relationship. Between those pictures and the elderly woman who now fairly governed Scratchmallow there could surely exist, at least for an accurate observer, scarcely anything more than the affinity of some old coquette turned pious with age to the follies of her youth. But nobody in Scratchmallow minded that!—nobody there, in truth, could be relied on to detect it. For Lapsley's retirement had thrown her back on herself; she had now to trust to her own inspirations, her own capricious opinions and decisions. Free from his guidance, she reverted somewhat to her original coarseness and obtuseness; but this, far from exasperating, actually made her more than ever acceptable to the Scratchmallowites, who welcomed aspects which they could easily focus and take in.

The artistic tendencies, in fact, which she had rubbed on by her contact with Lapsley, being, as time proved, but the merest varnish spread over her common little soul, planted ineradicably in English middle-class traditions, did soon, for lack of watchful eye and restoring hand, begin to crack and peel off in all directions. Particularly, a sharp illness which

attacked her when she was rather older than forty made terrible havoc with these superficial decorations, laying bare with astonishing vividness rests of old predilections, habits, and beliefs which one had thought utterly smothered by the gaudy accretions. No; for a woman born of publicans in a country town, passing her girlhood at an inn, framed by religionists dissenting from the Church established, to whom such notions of art as she had managed to pick up had come fortuitously and as a pendant to enterprizes more fleshly which she valued more—ah no! for such a woman art could not be, as she learned in her hour of trial, a lasting rest. And yet, with all that, when she remembered what racy sensations and excitements she had got out of art—and leave must be asked to remind the reader that the words Art and Religion are always used in our text for what they connoted in the Fladd terminology—sensations and excitements too which she felt in no wise disposed to forego, she could not bring herself to renounce altogether an endowment which could be taken on so many sides, with such strange and multifarious, even, if one wished, equivocal appeals. In that, moreover, in eliminating art from the religious equation she was now trying to simplify, she saw no permanent advantage to be gained either in the way of inward spiritual assistance, or of overawing possibly indocile beholders. All her ancestry of provincial little tradesmen more or less God-fearing was clamouring in

her for positive religion, but there was strong in her too the need, the forced plant, if you like, of sensation, sensation. Had she been a member of the Church of Rome, that benign, tolerant mother, who includes under her great mantle so many and such varying spiritual wants, would have enveloped Mrs. Fladd easily and satisfactorily too; but to Mrs. Fladd, thrown back at this crisis on her instincts, and early, ugly, narrow lessons, Rome appeared indubitably anathema and the fount of Satan, though of course in her insincere aesthetic adventures she had erewhile toyed with the superb apparel. This outlet, therefore, the only one on formal lines which could possibly offer, being out of the question, there was nothing for it but to map out a way for herself.

Certainly she had the two great requisites for late innovators in accepted religion, ignorance and audacity; but to do her justice, her daring at first planned nothing more than a straggling little lane—nay, an unnoticeable sheep-track running alongside the border of the acquainted odorous garden. To Wesleyanism she did not, as one might have been excused for anticipating, revert: she continued to be, on the contrary, an Anglican, only taking care now to become a drily practical one, putting the austere performance of her duties in such a light that it should not be hidden from men, and sedulously attending the services at the parish church. But inspired and encouraged by what she had heard in the time of her youth, and read

once more during her illness, of Joanna Southcott, of Mrs. Ann Lee, and other well-known females who had found the Thirty-nine Articles insufficiently stimulating, our Mrs. Fladd, in her turn, little by little built out from the parish church an adjunct, as it were a tin-tabernacle, with a thousand alien signs, which, however slightly it projected from the parent structure, did nevertheless manage to encroach into the regions—not indeed of heresy, but certainly of schism.

The Rev. Oldcart Bull, a clergyman of the ancient style, who hated cant, preached short sermons, thought a desire to reform the world a sign of ill-breeding, and occasionally rode to hounds, would have soon put a stop to this new kind of nonsense, and in the cause of decency would have outfaced and probably cowed Mrs. Fladd herself even at her full fighting strength, with the mayor and corporation of Scratch-mallow and the amateurs of art serried at her back; but the Rev. Oldcart Bull had some years since been gathered to his fathers. His successor, the Rev. A. Lurky Slam, was what is called an evangelical churchman, and entertained various enthusiastic notions, sometimes acting very ugly enthusiasm in the pulpit, imprecating temporal evils upon the unregenerate, calling upon the Almighty to let fall the lightning upon sinners, groaning, and occasionally even breaking into tears. Far from being, after the manner of his predecessor, hostile and almost contemptuous towards the Dissenting bodies in Scratch-

mallow, he attended and often spoke at their festivals, dwelling upon the sentiment of brotherhood, and the idea of a liberal English Church which might nourish from its ample breast all varieties of Christian belief, save only the pernicious errors of Popery. It will be heard then without too much surprise, that in this gentleman Mrs. Fladd found a zealous and effectual supporter. At the first dawning of the scheme he welcomed and encouraged it. Some even go so far as to maintain that at one of Mrs. Fladd's evening parties—which now that the bonnet-shop was so prosperous, and Mrs. Fladd opulent, ranked among the chief social functions of the town—it was he who actually suggested the enterprize; what is certain is that it was he who sketched out the general plan of the work, and established the principles which were to govern the little group afterwards to be known in religious history as the curious sect of the Fladdites. And indeed, that Mrs. Fladd was wealthy, and that the pious woman had found in the Rev. A. Lurky Slam an adviser of superior wisdom and a protector of great authority—these circumstances seemed verily to be managed by Providence to assist the faltering initiate steps of the congregation.

VIII

Next we see Mrs. Fladd actively engaged in gathering proselytes; and of these, from a variety of reasons, there were from the first no lack. Nevertheless, at

the outset she selected and sifted with the greatest care, only admitting those to participate in her exercises who she was sure by their temperament, by their corporal and spiritual promptings, would be in sympathy with her intentions. Early in the business she started a custom which has been since continued by her spiritual descendants, Fladdites of all shades, who however much they may differ from one another and generally from the Foundress have at least that in common,—a custom introduced for the double purpose of shewing to what extent her religion had its foundations in art, and of obviating all appearance of antagonism to the Church of England,—of calling her chapel or meeting-house a Studio. Had the far-off Lapsley heard that the building, of all others! she pitched upon for her performances was his own disused studio, towards which the town was growing out, he would doubtless have thought that she was adding, as they say, insult to injury; but in this selection she probably had her own ends, and anticipated a peculiar stimulation in working herself up to an emotional state under a roof where she had experienced already such variegated emotions. But however that may be, it was here at any rate that the work of Fladdism commenced on a Wednesday evening which was the forty-eighth birthday of Mrs. Fladd, the community assembled for the first exhortation numbering in all nine persons. At the second meeting this number was doubled; and thus encour-

aged, within about two months the main lines of ritual were definitely fixed.

When they had sung a hymn, always chosen, to mark nicely an affiliation with the national Church, from "Hymns Ancient and Modern", a picture set upon an easel over against the congregation and covered, would be unveiled; and upon that Mrs. Fladd, standing by the easel robed in harmony with the season, (her most successful robe was thought to be the one attuned to the vernal equinox), with a mystical staff which looked like a billiard-cue in one hand, and the other resting usually on the frame of the picture, would utter, or—to employ perhaps an exacter term—would ululate a moving discourse, taking the picture, so to speak, for a text. Her leanings, it should be explained, were towards paintings of a religious tendency, or to put it more accurately, of religious subjects. She perceived, in fact, with the cunning of the vulgar spiritless exhibitor at Royal Academy or Paris Salon, the immense value of Jesus Christ for pictorial purposes in an unchristian age which is no longer much influenced by His teaching, nor believes Him to be the Son of God, and still is not arrived as yet to regard Him without uneasiness as merely a man;—an age, in short, which is so hopelessly out of concert with the genuine spirit of Christianity that it is no longer even conscious of the shocking irreverence which, for the sadly pondering gazer, lies really almost on the surface of

those canvases in which Christ figures yearly on the walls of modern popular picture-shows. And as almost all such pictures have an undesirable kind of success, Mrs. Fladd for her own ends purchased many of them, or reproductions of them, in more or less cheap media, and at her reunions one or other of these works would be impressively uncovered to the appropriate sound of Gounod's sugary music played slowly on the harmonium. You then saw a Christ with vapid simpering face, frizzed and bewigged, the very type of the handsome actor, the *beau garçon*, with exploding fireworks round his head to symbolize his divinity, placed in the most undignified situations, amid all the concernments of degradation:—at the opera seated among modern dress coats; in expensive restaurants supping amid hussars and kept women; on the racecourse, standing with the dreadful brutal bookmakers and policemen; on the stock-exchange gazing with a weak imploring silly smile on turbulent gambling financiers: not a detail of all this depressing morbidity resisted;—nay, sometimes even, by a perfectly fatal stroke of the artist floundering in a veritable wallow of nauseous sentiment and cheap sensationalism, with the vestiges of His Passion upon Him or by His side, introduced shamelessly, in a way to make the observer quail, as he recalled, in face of this art of the pastry-cook, this glare and noise of delirious paint, the significance of that bitter day, that majestic scene.

With inspiration of this quality it will be readily understood that the topics suggested to Mrs. Fladd as seemly for discourse were sufficiently numerous; and from the text a notion of the kind of discourse may be gathered. But at the same time, good as all that was, and encouraging in results, she was shrewd enough to realize that pictures too assiduously dogmatic might stale if unduly repeated. Indeed, after six meetings given up to this sort of thing, she seemed to encounter in her congregation a resiliency, and took wary note that restiveness, or what experts in the spiritual life term "spiritual dryness", might be expected to supervene unless the exercises were varied. From that hour forth, alternating with the misguided travesties of Christ, one saw uncovered on the easel pictures of fleshly naked trollops lounging about near scintillant pools of water, painted to the taste of the barber-shop and the hotel furnisher, abject invocations to sensuality, making in fact the same crude and unstimulating appeal to the senses as the bedizened hussy who stipulates for her perquisites before disrobing. And such paintings, even more than those of determined religiosity, stirred Mrs. Fladd to extraordinary eloquence; carried away by excitement she came out with the most astonishing things. The congregation, sympathetic and verily transported, responded to the treatment beautifully: dazed, with moist lips, their eyes reverting from the picture to their priestess, they watched her as she

smiled and smiled and gestured: then, at last, worked up to the highest pitch of religious sensitiveness, faint with enthusiasm, they fell as one body on their knees, groping and gesticulating, with groans and convulsions congruous to the attitude.*

It all had from the very start an immense success. Crowds, not only from Scratchmallow, but from neighbouring villages and towns where the rumour had permeated, flocked to the studio, and, it is not too much to say, clamoured for admission. It was, they felt, the best contrived scheme of Sunday and holiday recreation which had ever been offered to staid people on whom the restrictions of their narrow lives weighed; it was, the whole thing, an irreproachable way of taking the lid off: dissipation, in a word, without disadvantages or disrepute. But Mrs. Fladd, who didn't in the least want an unfiltered mob, saw with no pleasure the turbulence at her doors, and before long, with one stroke excluded embarrassing disciples, and reduced her congregation within profitable limits, by declaring, just as soon as she found out that the prosperous were willing, even eager, to pay for their emotions, that her mission was to the prosperous only.

And certainly it must be acknowledged on all hands that she gave the prosperous what they

*) The reader who desires a further and more minute knowledge of these singular rites is invited to consult Mrs. Grabthorn's "Fladdites and Fladdism" which will presently be printed.

paid for. There, in an adroitly managed soothing atmosphere of flowers and heavy scents, lulled on soft cushions in the half-darkened studio, with tall beautiful attendants, descried sometimes far afield, and garnered with unerring discriminate hands, moving graciously about to minister, carrying dainty refreshing things in clear vessels; there, where you had, unless your conscience was foolishly unquiet, a sense that you were estimably fulfilling your religious duties at church or chapel, in a place, however, from which the stringent formalism of church or chapel was delightfully absent;—yes, there indeed, if you were one of the prosperous, you might well feel that you were getting presently as much and more than you paid for, and besides, continue with that comfortable assurance when, the service over, you turned into the cold night, perhaps a little hebetated, a little unnerved, but all the same pleasantly bewildered and tired.

A friend of Lapsley's, rambling curiously to Scratchmallow five or six years after the origin of Fladdism, at a moment in fact when it was in full blast, and Mrs. Fladd extremely rich and courted on all sides, had the impudence to say, after he had been received courteously and even a little sentimentally by the amiable foundress, that she looked like a superannuated light-o'-love who had laid by practice and taken to keep a disorderly house. But this scandalous language, prompted by unworthy friendship, and

coloured by despite, found, need it be said? neither commendation nor echo, least of all from the inhabitants of Scratchmallow. Ah! to them, as she grew old, Mrs. Fladd did rather appear a contented saint, enamoured of religion, and waiting without too much impatience for even greater rewards in an even better world.

Certainly, they were long in coming, those rewards. Mrs. Fladd, being at the top of all earthly bliss in regard of her wealth, the good marriages of her children, the constant prosperity of her foundation, and her great renown throughout Scratchmallow—say, even, the whole of England, had attained to her eighty-seventh year ere loaden with age, and in a most blessed mind, she passed from this world at the new large house in Scratchmallow which herself had built. The last years of the venerable woman were filled, as was all her life, with many joys and a few trials. Among these last must be painfully included the defection of several of her spiritual daughters, assistants at her rites, whom she had specially trusted with her confidence, and who, actuated by a shameful levity, a deliberate barbarity, a restlessness to diffuse slander, ascribed loudly the fits of temporary paralysis at times observable in their priestess, and the rubicund hue of her visage, to an inordinate use of strong waters. But all such unworthy motions and odious suggestions were forgotten, once for all, upon that solemn day when Mrs. Fladd, full of years and

works, was borne through sorrowing crowds to her place of burial, attended on this last journey, as herself would have wished, by the mayor and corporation of Scratchmallow.

IX

Not quite two years ago, that bust, with a drinking-fountain as a base, which ornaments the market-place at Scratchmallow, was unveiled by the member of Parliament for the division before a great throng of people, come together from all parts for the ceremony, and to view the subsequent illumination of the town. This chaste monument, the work of an eminent Royal Academician, is too well known to excuse minute description: it is inspected by all who visit the place, and during the summer months American ladies may be seen taking photographs of it to carry back with them to their native land.

What a memorable ceremony! On the evening next before heavy drops of rain had fallen, but the morning broke at last into wonderful sunshine which gladdened the streets early astir, and seemed to linger, as one might fancifully take note, with its thin, cool, silvery, English light, in special fondness upon the older twisted ways and picturesque gables. Gaily now beneath it a multitude was passing to the market-place, where, soon, every possible standing-place, as well as windows and the roofs of the houses, was

crowded with sight-seers, the eyes of all being turned to the great stand which had been built against the veiled statue of the heroine. Here were taking their places, gradually and sedately, many principal gentlemen, accompanied by their wives and daughters, a brass band meanwhile attacking various airs and somewhat incongruous quick-steps till it had exhausted its meagre repertory, when it played them all over again. Even the touch of the lugubrious, so seldom lacking in English provincial festivals, was supplied by the forethought of the "proprietor" of the largest hotel and livery-stables, who hired out the roof of his hearse as a coign of vantage at so much a head.

Two motor-cars, spitting and groaning, brought up, surely a little late! the High Sheriff of the county and his "house-party". Royalty, appealed to by the Committee to illustrate the spectacle, had replied by Private Secretary that were it not for numberless pressing engagements It would have had great pleasure in visiting Scratchmallow; and although this could not be regarded otherwise than as a disappointment, still, as the local newspaper thought fit to put it, the place of Royalty was worthily taken by the member of Parliament,—who indeed did bear himself very consciously. On the stand too might be seen, besides all the county-people, the mayor and corporation of Scratchmallow, the chief of the local fire-brigade, and—tenderly guarded by those discreetly radiant daughters of a famous mother, Mrs. Grabthorn and Mrs.

Hele—the white venerable head and mildly beaming face of the Rev. A. Lurky Slam.

It was in fact Mr. Slam—trembling, the ancient man! with joy and pride at this consecration and public crowning of what might be accounted in some sort his work,—who began the ceremony with prayer. He was followed by the mayor with a speech, who was followed by the High Sheriff with another; and then, with due care for effect reserved assiduously, and reserving himself, till the very end, the member of Parliament at length took the word.

The main passages of his discourse given here, have been extracted from a report of the proceedings in *The Times*. And truly in his speech the germs of legend inseparable, it would seem, from the story of all saints and religious enthusiasts, may be observed gathering: Lapsley, it will be remarked, in the popular mind has already developed into an uncertain number of persons, nameless and vague.

The honourable gentleman began by saying that this great and distinguished assembly had met to do honour to a good woman, a pious woman, he would say a noble woman. (Hear, hear.). Not only had she contributed to the honour and prosperity of Scratchmallow by deeds which were in every one's mouth, but, as he had always understood, and as was generally, he might add, universally believed, many other men and women, painters and musicians and writers of books, even clergymen, profited by her talents and reaped the

benefits she was too diffident and unworldly to secure for herself. As for himself, he could not say he admired such people; (Hear, hear.) he could not say he approved of them. (Cheers.). No doubt some people were fond of sailing under false colours, of sleeping, if he might be pardoned the figure, under somebody else's sheet, and they didn't much care whose if they gained something by it. Some people, for instance, of whom Scratchmallow saw something whenever a general election was in the horizon, couldn't make up their minds what political party they belonged to. (Laughter and cheers.). Many a time during his visits to his constituency, which, notwithstanding the insinuations of the party who thought they were going to take the seat from him at the next election (cries of "They won't" and cheers.) were, he ventured to say, frequent and prolonged—yes, many a time he had shaken by the hand the venerable woman in whose honour they were gathered there. He would go further, he would say, and he didn't care who knew it, (cheers.) that in company with their respected pastor the Rev. A. Lurky Slam, he had even taken an innocent cup of tea at her house. It was to be hoped no political capital would be made out of that. (Hear, hear.). He hoped he was a free man. (Loud cheers.). He hoped he should always be able to go where he liked without being taken to task. (cheers.). He hoped that the rash opinions of fledglings and newcomers would not be allowed to outweigh long, important,

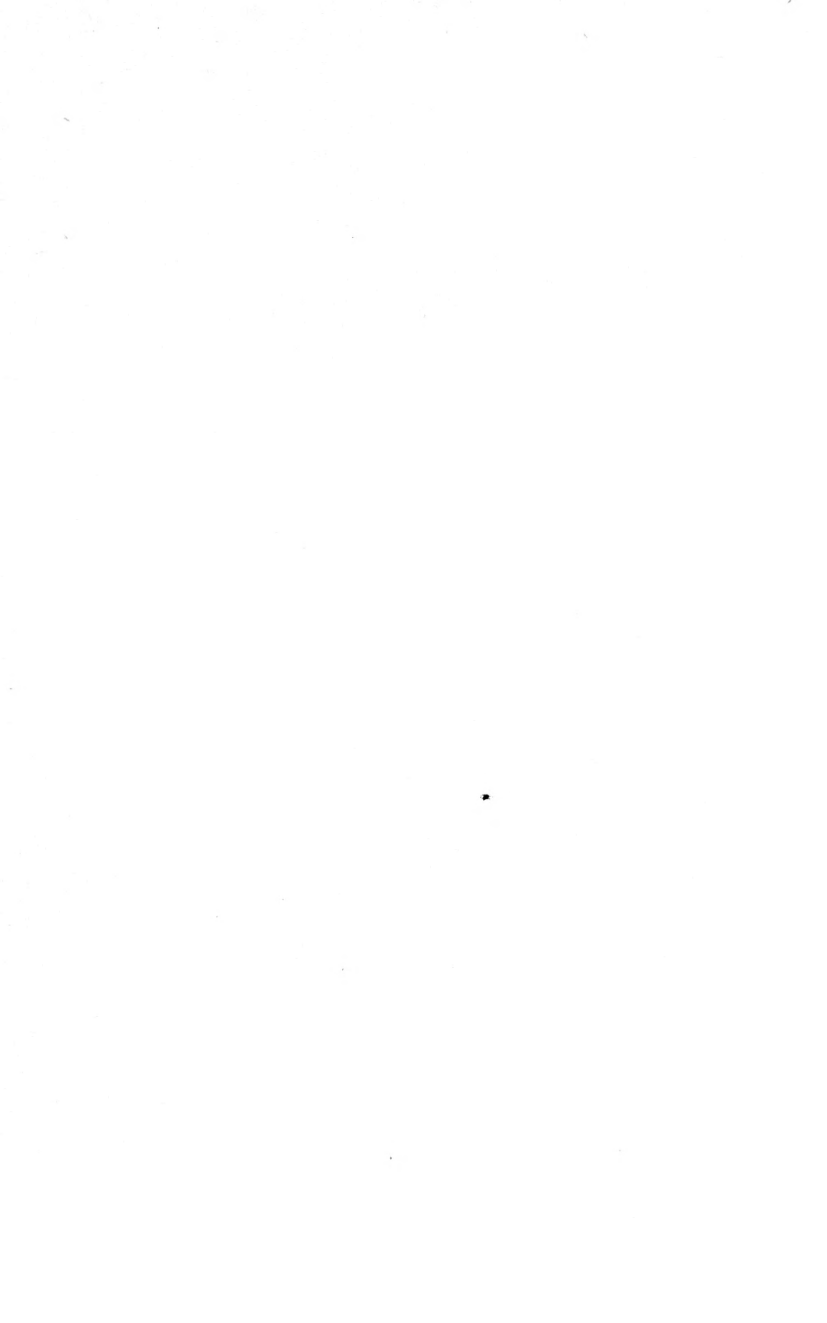
and burthensome services to the town.—The hon. gentleman concluded by stating that he had not come there to make a political speech, and amid prolonged cheering unveiled the monument, while the band at the same moment struck up the National Anthem.

To the foregoing beautiful words we can do no better than add the inscription on the pedestal:—

TO
 CAROLINE CATHERINE FLADD
 A WOMAN IN WHOM THE HIGHEST QUALITIES
 OF MODESTY DILIGENCE RELIGION AND ART
 WERE UNITED
 WHO NOT FOR HERSELF ALONE
 BUT FOR OTHERS LABOURED
 SPREADING ABROAD WORKS VARIOUSLY ATTRIBUTED
 ASSISTING WITH HER BRUSH AND PEN
 LESS GIFTED CONTEMPORARIES
 HIDING HER LIGHT FORBEARING HER CLAIM
 THE CITIZENS OF SCRATCHMALLOW
 WHERE SHE DWELT FOR NIGH UPON SEVENTY YEARS
 HAVE ERECTED THIS MONUMENT
 AS A TRIBUTE TO
 PIETY GENIUS AND VIRTUE.

The dates, and Proverbs XXXI. 31 follow.

THE BARS OF THE PIT



THE BARS OF THE PIT

And where is now my hope? as for my hope
who shall see it? They shall go down to the
bars of the pit.

Job XVII. 15, 16.

WHEN the last notes of the opera had sounded, and the curtain slowly came down, the plaudits and huzzas were so loud and prolonged that it seemed to me the whole of Vienna must have been let loose to bellow its approbation. I had heard of what they call popular ovations for great composers, but this was the only one I had ever seen which truly merited the description. Even those there who had little or no genuine feeling for music or any other art, who must of course form the largest body of spectators in gatherings of this kind, were carried away by that well-known contagion to which those who make up a crowd are exposed, and perhaps shouted the loudest. I must confess it was impressive enough to see that great theatre filled with brilliant and beautiful people as mad with enthusiasm for one old man who had appealed to them with no vulgar state or parade, as they might have been for a great king, or a great conqueror. It was the first performance of a

new opera by the celebrated Russian composer who died nearly three years ago. Written in his seventieth year, it proved to be his last work, and by many it is esteemed his best.

A party of us, amongst whom was L—, the poet, whose poem the composer had chosen for his opera, went across to Sacher's restaurant for supper. We had a private room; and the Master, who had been obliged to linger while he received the compliments of the Kaiser, or the Archdukes, or I don't know who, had promised to join us as soon as he could get free.

Meanwhile we asked L—, who had seen him just after that storm of applause at the end of the last act, how the old man had taken it. It was easy to see how L— himself had taken it: he was flushed and radiant.

"He didn't seem much moved", answered L—; "in fact I don't think he was moved at all. Or at least except in one point I noticed which seems absurd, and may well have been in my imagination:—I was excited enough to imagine the theatre was on fire if any one had suggested it. Anyhow, as he talked to me, through that melancholy, that kind of terror which is always about him, I thought I made out a strange look—something new—in his eyes. The applause had hardly died away in the theatre, and I thought I saw in his eyes—not contempt exactly—no, it wasn't that—it was more a look of hatred, of rage, of vengeance, and—you may laugh if you like—I swear it seemed

to me a look of unsatisfied vengeance—a vengeance only half appeased.”

We took this up and discussed it with more or less eagerness: the Master was one of those mysterious men about whom, as in the case of ghosts, people are always willing to discuss any proposition thrown out, because they feel certain they are not even on the skirts of truth. We fell back upon this atmosphere of melancholy, and as L— had said, this species of terror which constantly enveloped him. Yes, we agreed, there was no doubt that he was uncanny. We were all fairly intelligent, I think; we made due allowance for the difference between the genius, the madman, and ordinary humanity; but after that we wandered whither we would—rather wildly, I’m afraid. Some attributed his character to the struggles and obscurity of his young years; some esteemed that the number of years he had gone unrecognised had embittered him; some accounted for the whole matter by heredity:—the son of obscure Russians flung into new and artificial conditions, and the conditions perhaps reacting on him. There was not wanting even the commonplace suggestion in cases of this nature of thwarted and unfortunate love.

We were hard at it when the door was thrown open and the Master himself came in. I picture him still as he walked through the room in the odour of flowers and cigarette smoke, his tall thin figure hardly bent at all with age, his neat white hair just touching his

velvet coat, and above all that unforgettable face, not in the least of the blunt Slav type, but rather with a clear-cut fineness almost eastern, the whole suffused by a subtilty, and dreaminess, and sombreness commingled which you found at once attractive and yet somehow repulsive, but at any rate unusual. In his youth he must have been singularly handsome, and even in his age he had conserved in his features traces of that terrible sensitiveness for which the possessor pays, till he becomes hardened by age, or insane, with such bitter hours. Nor would his portrait be complete without some mention of his wonderful hands, now indeed somewhat crabbed and dry from age, but still of incredible daintiness—made to touch flowers, and fragile porcelain, and precious stones. It was said he preferred the violin to all other instruments, and it was not difficult to realize that with a hand of that kind he could do more with a bow than with a keyboard. We all examined him pretty closely, as well we might: it was the night of his triumph and he seemed to expect our scrutiny. But the envy, or at least the little half-sighs of desire which often accompany such looks at a celebrated personage, were in this case, I am sure, absent. There was something about the Master which extinguished envy. Each of us felt that he would not take to himself the gnawing serpents of anxiety and wretchedness which lurked in that man's mind, for all the laurels in the world.

He sat down, broke a piece of bread, and drank half a glass of wine. He seemed rather fatigued, but not otherwise disturbed. He jested pleasantly enough about a man of his age coming to a supper party at that hour of night. His age indeed seemed very present with him at the moment, and he kept coming back to it in his talk.

"It is all very well for L— here," he said, putting his hand on the poet's shoulder, "who has youth, and fire, and courage, to go out and gather his smiles on the highways. But as for me—" He made a little pout of disgust. "What a ridiculously giddy old thing I must seem to all you young people. I feel that I haven't a shred of character left. I paint my face, and wear a wig and too many jewels. Seriously, the dignified thing for me to have done would have been to have waited at home in silence for the traditional telegram. Instead of that, I expect I shall finish my youthful frolic to-night by breaking the shop-windows in the Graben."

"But surely, *cher maître*, if you *will* think of your age, it must make you very happy when you look back over so many years and see the steps and struggles and hard work which have made you the great master you are." It was the pretty little Mme. W-. who found herself there, and who ventures such things, who said that. Some of us gave her a look of thanks: we found his insistence upon his age a little excessive.

The Master put his elbows on the table, took his

face between his hands, and glanced round at the company. "I wonder," he said slowly, to Mme. W., "I wonder when you ask me to do that, if you really have the slightest inkling of the kind of torture you suggest I should go in for. And yet," he added, "I have a good mind to do it,—yes, I will. I am excited; this is an occasion which will never recur. To-night, I feel, is the culminating point in my career; let me celebrate it by getting some perilous stuff off my heart. It has lain there so long that it hates to be disturbed. It is almost wrenching nature to disturb it. And really in telling now in this gay company what I have never uttered to a soul in solitude, I feel like a man going naked through a busy street. You say you owe me some trifling pleasure from this evening," he said with a little bow; "you can easily repay me by listening to an old man's tale.

I

"I was thirty years old. Here in this very city of Vienna I was living, not in actual physical wretchedness, for I had always enough to eat, but still in deplorable conditions. From my twenty-fifth year I had drifted through no fault of my own into a backwater of life: not only was I without real friends, but I was without the acquaintance who in a measure make up for the lack of friends. I knew nobody to speak to: I knew nobody even to write to. All my pains and disappointments had to be eaten up in my

own bosom. Add, that I had singularly little power of exciting sympathy, that, either through pride or shyness, I would have found myself at the last extremity ere I had asked for any being's sympathy or society, and you will easily enough understand that even with the people of the house where I lodged I had very little intercourse. If they saw me well they took it for granted, if they saw me ill they were not unquiet so long as the rent was paid. No doubt I could have picked up companions of a sort by sitting in the beer-gardens and drinking with the first comer; but I was fastidious in my way, and if I couldn't have good companionship I preferred to go without any. Possibly some of you here think you know what solitude is: you have gone to some remote place in the Alps or Pyrenees and you have lived more or less alone for three or four months, with all the time the conviction that your exile was voluntary, and a comfortable consciousness at the back of your head of the express train which you might step into from day to day and which in a few hours would land you among your clubs, and your friends, and your usual life. Well, let me assure you that you know nothing about solitude. In the days I speak of, when I chanced to read in a book an author's complacent description of his solitude, I used nearly to go mad with rage and scorn. Whatever is voluntary cannot be altogether painful: my solitude was involuntary. Besides, your solitary, I have found, is seldom quite alone; he has

struck up a friendship with the brave fisherman, or the honest blacksmith, upon whom he sheds his wisdom. Now I have known what it is to go for a year without speaking a word to any soul, except just those few words which the obscurest existence makes necessary, and do not take up two minutes all together in a week. I have known what it is to feel a few casual sentences exchanged at random, which one leading a normal life would not think of twice—I have known that to become an event in my life, and give me matter for speculation to last a month. I have known what it is to move about a great city with no sense of making one with the crowd, with no sentiment of human solidarity, feeling on the contrary a helpless piece of wreckage absolutely at the mercy of the human sea, as I drifted through the streets gazing fearfully yet wistfully at the passers, even as a spectre exiled from another world might gaze; hating them too because I feared them, and feeling in my turn that I was hated by them because I was different.

“This kind of life signally hindered my poor fortunes. On the few occasions when I came in contact with men of the world to discuss affairs, they found me stupid, and unready, and disagreeable; and I have no doubt they were right. For them a conversation such as they had with me was an every-day affair, or rather a ten-times-a-day affair, to which they attached little or no importance and never gave a thought before or after; for me, on the other hand,

it was an abnormal event, filled with a thousand dangers and ruses, to be prepared for by endless precautions. Add to this, that as human intercourse had no part in my existence, my normal state was to be silent, and even in the most ordinary conversation I felt myself in the regions of the unreal; that I was acting, and I placed my words, so to speak, with an eye to a foreseen effect;—that my interlocutor, in a word, stood in the same relation to me as an audience to a playwright; and you will get some notion of the sorry result. How often have I gone over a conversation days afterwards word for word in my head, correcting it with abominable sensitiveness, as one might correct a proof! No wonder people found that I lacked spontaneity; a man of the present age in a suit of mediaeval armour we should not find spontaneous.

“In one matter, however, I saw clearly. I felt that the law, which had its origin in the desire of the weak for protection against the oppressor, had become from various causes and by various accretions a kind of oppressor itself—that is to say, a blind machine of terrible power, pretending to be worked by accurate science, but with no trace of scientific precision in its action. I reminded myself that while the law is a protection for groups of citizens, before it the individual is generally in the wrong. If the individual be lonely, and friendless, and powerless, for such an one it is pitiless: before it he is certainly

in the wrong. At its core the law is rotted by obsequiousness. The policeman who is a protection for the noble and the banker, is a perpetual menace for the weak and obscure. For the entirely powerless, for the social outcast, for the pariah dog, such as I (however blameless) was become, he is a sombre dread and terror, and takes the aspect of a malignant arbitrary god who may at any moment, if the whim seizes him, lay his heavy hand on your shoulder and ruin the rest of your days. The number of cases which we read of daily in the newspapers of all lands where the testimony of the prisoner goes for nothing against some tainted evidence the police have raked up, or even against the policeman's unsupported word, does nothing to weaken this belief. I resolved, therefore, seeing myself a mere shred and feather in the world without a scrap of importance of any kind, without a hope of protection on any side—nay, with no claims or qualifications whatever which I could think would weigh for a moment with any judge against the testimony of a man almost certainly prejudiced, and possibly ignorant and malevolent into the bargain; a man whom society at the same time as it gave him a uniform invested mystically with omniscience, the most rigid veracity, the impossibility to fall into error—seeing all this, I resolved, I say, to live in such a manner that the hand of this monster might never have cause to touch me, either to crush, or what was almost as terrible, to help. I did my best

to occupy my mean little life as one is supposed to occupy an apartment in Paris—*bourgeoisement*. Many an injustice have I let go by unnoticed to keep to my resolution;—a strange enough result if one ever really hoped for justice from Justice. Many an hour have I sat trembling, lest my will being overpowered by some sudden freak of insanity, I might be betrayed into some act which would cast me between those iron hands by which I should be most infallibly ground to powder without reflexion or mercy. I came to shrink from the most harmless frequentations, torturing myself to carry forward all situations from their actual circumstances towards purely hypothetical ones which were unlikely to come about, which it was most improbable would come about, but which still might possibly come about—such circumstances, I mean, as would suggest to a policeman to interfere. My constant feeling of the impression of this tyrant put such disorder in my spirits, that whenever I heard the law or courts or criminals mentioned, so great a confusion would at once shew itself in my countenance that many people must have thought I had something to conceal and was afraid of the police,—which indeed I was, but not in the sense they meant.

“By way of getting a living I copied music— a badly paid trade, but taken with a little store of my own it enabled me to live. I tried giving lessons, but I found them insupportable, and the employers I

fell in with, mostly of the small-burgess class, were rude and exigent, with a vanity to have Mademoiselle play the piano. I am rather sorry now I did not seriously try to get lessons amongst the important families here: I might have interested one or two, and they might have helped me in the wild night and darkness. But would they have helped, after all? I wonder. I confess I doubt it.

“One of the publishers I copied for thought I had some talent. One day when I called as usual at his shop, he told me of a place of choir-master at Munich which was sure to suit me. I was delighted, and determined to start for Munich at once. There was nothing to make me tarry at Vienna, and accordingly I set out the following day. Towards evening I came to Salzburg, where I lay the night. True to my principle never to put my foot into any lodging which might possibly be suspect, or where suspicious people might gather with whom the law would not hesitate to confound the innocent, I descended at a very decent, even expensive inn by the Residenz Platz. You could catch sight of Mozart’s statue from the windows. All this is forty years ago, and the hotel may now have disappeared. I ate my supper, went out, looked at Mozart, looked at the fountain before the Cathedral, penetrated through an archway to the river, stood on the bridge a while watching the lights and the rapid water, thought of my choir-mastership, strolled slowly back and went to bed.

The next morning after breakfast, having a couple of hours on my hands before the train started, I went out again, roamed about a little in the great bare Cathedral, crossed the river, mounted up past the stations of the Cross to the height of the Capuzinerberg, and then, when I thought it was time, returned to my inn, went to my room, and called for my reckoning.

Now as I stood waiting in the little room, I noticed on the floor near the bed a spot of wet blood. It was not much bigger than a five-crown silver piece. Except that I hate the sight of blood in itself, I was not otherwise startled: so far as I thought about it at all, I thought that the man who had carried down my trunk had fallen a-bleeding from the nose, or had cut his finger. That was all.

"And yet the sight must have had a deeper effect than it seemed at the moment to have; for all the time of my journey to Munich I was besieged by vague presentiments of evil. At Munich I repaired to another decent inn near the Frauenkirche: I mention this because I have never since been able to hear any bells, the sound of which resembles the dismal toll of the clock of the Frauenkirche, without a sensation of faintness. I was tired; I lay fully dressed on my bed; soon I fell asleep. Had God been merciful I should have died while I slept.

"I was rudely awakened by a heavy knock and a loud voice summoning me to open the door which I had fastened. I started up, but half awake. Two

policemen followed by the landlord came into the room. I was shocked almost out of my senses; but at the same time I must add that these terrible men coming into my room without my leave did not in itself surprise me as it might any of you: I was nothing, whereas their power was absolute: as well might the blade of grass expostulate with the boot that crushes it. They explained gruffly that they had instructions from Salzburg to arrest me on a charge of murder committed at an inn in that town.

“I stammered some sentences in my pitiful broken German; but I don’t think I shewed any passion. Remember that I had not the habit of fluent speech; remember too that I regarded the human race acting thus concretely as something incredibly powerful, malicious, and pitiless. Now that it had risen against me, I abandoned all hope. If there are any of you here whose minds are so moulded by traditions and prejudice that it is impossible for you to think except by the formulas and systems which generations hand down one to another, you will say that such is not the attitude of an innocent man. All I can reply is, that such was my attitude, and that I was innocent. Indeed, what I think did me considerable harm in the estimation of these functionaries, formed in a groove, rigorously drilled in traditions which they could no more dispense with conveniently than they could with their breath,—was that I did not in effect shew all the surprise to be looked for if their arrival

had been totally unexpected. No, I did not shew an immense surprise, for let me avow that their visit did not in truth come altogether without warning. All my vague fears had crystallized since a moment; I knew now that this horrible thing which had just happened was what I had apprehended since I had seen the blood stain on the floor. Ah, truly, judges should be selected, not from the sober pedants learned in precedents and punishments, not from the ample discourses, the rotund orators, not from the fox-like knaves who in the name of justice set their trained wits to befog and befool some unhappy, unready, ignorant wretch in the witness-box—no, not among them should we seek the judge, but rather among the subtlest and profoundest students of the thousand variations and aberrations of the poor human brain.

“I was to be returned to Salzburg. One took me by each arm, and I was led ignominiously through the streets to the station. Oh, my friends, with what words can I bring home to you the anguish, the sickening of heart of that ruining moment! To estimate aright its poignancy, you must recall that no nun cloistered from the world had kept clearer of offences, including those which the law pretends not to interfere with, than I had. Remember again, that I was abnormally sensitive, that I had a power of feeling and imagination a thousand times more acute than the average prisoner. Moreover, one thing I had always cherished above all—my personal liberty; the power

to go and come at my own will. This feeling was as strong in me as it was in Rousseau; it was in fact the spring of all that sedulous care I took to keep my life clear and disentangled. Judge then my horror, my prostration, as I put it to myself that by no means in the world could I stay in Munich, could I stay anywhere or go anywhere except just to the gaol at Salzburg.

And as if these tortures were not sufficient, there was another bar still in the gridiron. You will have gathered that I have little or no faith in the protection afforded by justice administered through law. But beyond that, I have never been able to convince myself either from history or observation that mankind at large is naturally just. I have never had reason to believe that before a pitiable and humiliated brother the instincts of men lead them to act nobly. I have therefore always had a peculiar dread, a physical loathing and shrinking from all situations where men might be tempted to be malevolent and brutal, because I have felt certain they would yield to the temptation. I have been sure from my earliest youth that whatever rarities I may possess would be no match whatever as against man acting upon the impulses of his corporal strength directed by his dwarfed and malignant mind. The man-brute had always filled me with more repulsion and horror than anything else in creation, because I knew what his ferocity would be if he were once un-

chained. Alas, what I now experienced gave me no ground to modify this conviction. Against the criminal real or supposed—anyhow against the luckless individual whom the machine has sucked in, the whole of humanity is unchained. My captors were of course domineering and brutal enough; but after all that was part of their profession, and besides they were brutal in a half-mocking, almost good-humoured manner, as men congratulating themselves on having done a sharp turn in collaring a dangerous felon before he had got clean away. But never shall I forget the hateful fiendish looks,—a minglement of mean cowardice, of suspicion, of self-righteousness, contempt and triumph, which were cast upon me by the men who looked at me in the street, and at the station who passed by the windows of the train. Such looks do cringing cowardly slaves cast at their fellow-slave when the master has felled him to the ground. At Rosenheim, where we had to change the train, a few women gazed at me with a certain tenderness; and those were the only glances of pity I saw till the end. The great scene which was transacted on Calvary is typical in all its superb details: was it not women who followed the prisoner weeping?

“But, you will ask, what was the crime? That is what I myself kept asking my captors all the dreary way to Salzburg, and for all reply they threw me bits of answers in the sarcastic tone of one who conveys to another information which he thinks the quest-

ioner is only pretending not to know. At Salzburg, however, I gathered the following facts.—A farmer of the hill-country having come down to Salzburg for the market, had lodged in the room next to mine at the inn. His affairs were known to have prospered, and on the night we both spent at the inn it was certain he had a rather large sum of money in his possession. About an hour after I left the inn his murdered body was discovered in my room under my bed. There was no money in his clothes beyond a few pence. But I had paid at the railway station for my ticket to Munich with a fifty-crown note bearing a number which a Salzburg banker stated he had issued to the farmer the day before. In those days the press of travel was not nearly so great as it is now, and the railway clerk easily remembered who had tendered a fifty-crown note for a ticket to Munich. All this was recited to me, and I could only reply that I knew I had had a fifty-crown note, though I had never noticed its number; that I had had it when I arrived at the inn; that I had paid with it for my journey to Munich; and that I certainly not had taken it from the farmer. The magistrate told me he believed that I lied; he had evidently made up his mind I was the last of men; and after a summary examination which he contrived to render more atrocious by a thousand insolences, I was sent to prison.”

“But didn’t you protest. didn’t you threaten to appeal to some one—to the Kaiser?” exclaimed Mme.

W., whose eyes were very bright and who looked feverish and excited.

“Appeal? protest?” repeated the Master, glancing round the table very drearily. “Threaten?” he repeated. “Ah, yes, it is very well for all of you here, people of assured positions, flanked by affectionate, or at least assiduous relatives and friends, backed by Ambassadors and Consulates, to talk of threats and appeals and Kaisers. That is just the sort of thing that would first come into the head of people with power and the means to use it—people who have never been humbled. But it is precisely the people with power who scarcely ever find themselves in such positions. The law and police avoid people with power as if they brought bad luck. Look at myself. I know that if the body of a man was discovered under my bed to-night, they would send to the confines of the world for the culprit before they would suspect me. Am I not honoured with the friendship of the Kaiser, of statesmen and princes? But as I was then, at the most awful moment of my life—ah, my dear friends, that was a different song, I assure you. What was a poor solitary wretch, a foreigner without friends, lacking even acquaintances of the least importance, who had never seen an ambassador, and would have been kicked by the ambassador’s lackeys if he had tried to, who had never been at a Consulate except to get his passport visa-ed by a clerk behind a grill—with what confidence could

such a one threaten an honourable judge supported by all the weight of the state and public opinion? Would not his protest degenerate into a mean swagger, pitiful to bring tears to the eyes? Ah, my brothers, why do we laugh so harshly when we see a poor devil trying to ape his betters—"to play the gentleman", as they say? Is there not rather something infinitely moving in the sight, is he not after all trying through his imagination for just a little of that power which will help him against injustice in his day of need? Anyhow, that is how it seems to me. The powerful man has no idea to what extent the powerless man feels powerless. And even if I had decided to protest, who would have listened, who would have believed? Besides, I had always borne myself so meek, I had so continually effaced myself, my spirit and self-respect had been so ruined by numberless degradations and insults suffered in silence during years, that I was become the unfittest person in the world to defend myself. I knew what I wanted to say, I knew what I should say, and when I opened my mouth it came out shambling, the merest shadow of what I had intended. That is why I dwelt a while ago on the solitude in which I had lived, that you might realize to what extent I had lost the use of man's natural weapon, speech.

But while we are upon appeals and protests, I will add that I did think of writing a statement of my case to one or two of those gentleman in Paris and elsewhere who

are called Socialists, and who have written beautiful books against the injustice which crushes down the outcast man. Well, upon reflexion I refrained, and I will tell you why. I considered that all of these gentleman were men of reputation, not only in their immediate circle, but in the world generally; fashionable people went to hear them speak, their books were found in fashionable houses. Now, I reasoned that these men, sprung for the most part from families of the lower middle-class which had been coerced for generations by the police, however strong-minded and kind-hearted they might be, must still have enough of the rags of heredity hanging about them to shy at the letter of a foreigner lying in a far-off gaol on a capital charge; must still be subject to their surroundings so far as to argue somewhat as follows:—‘After all, when the police get hold of a man and put him in prison there must be something in it. The police don’t often make mistakes. I had better not interfere: I may get myself into trouble, or make trouble with a foreign government. Besides, this may well be a plausible scoundrel.’ And, to strengthen him in these prudent resolutions, even if upon a thousand chances he was disposed for more generous action, there would always be a wife, I thought, to counsel him at breakfast: ‘Don’t mix yourself up in it, Antoine; if you do, and it makes a smash, the Senator’s wife will stop coming on my Tuesdays.’ Looking back, with forty years’ added experience of men, I

still think that my reasoning was sound. Those who know the eighteenth century say that Voltaire did not move in the case of Calas till he was sure of a backing. And Calas, after all, was rather important, what the devil!—a Protestant, a religious man, almost a gentleman:—not at all the same thing as entangling yourself in questionable relations with an obscure foreign worm accused of murder. Let us recollect that, however you look at it, one owes something to society, one has a reputation to keep up!

“Once indeed the spell was broken, and I did speak really and truly from the depths of my tortured heart. The lawyer appointed to defend me was a genial, almost a jovial personage. He spoke to me softly, even kindly; he seemed amiable. Abandoned by all, thrown upon myself, yearning for some support, for some sympathy, I was at the mercy of the first person who shewed—no, I will not say pity; but who at any rate appeared to regard me otherwise than as something vile and noxious. One day with this lawyer I did indeed shift the burthen: I told him my story just as I have told it now, only with how much more fire, more vigour, more conviction! Then I was pleading for my very existence: now I am not pleading for anything; I am relating. We were alone, and by a miracle all my awkwardness, my timidity, my false shame fell from me. There on the floor of my dungeon with what passion, what abandon I was delivering up my miserable soul, when all at

once I happened to glance at the lawyer and I perceived a kind of smirk lurking on the thick lips.

‘Repeat that in the assize-court,’ he said, ‘and by Heaven, we may get you off. I find it very well done.’

“At that terrible word the black waters surged over me. That was the end. In my simplicity I had thought to convince this man; I had torn away the bandages which habit had made almost part of my nature and shewn him my green wounds bleeding, and he took me for a comedian.

“So without encouragement or hope I lay in gaol and waited for the trial. When the trial did come on, it must have appeared to all but myself a very simple, even uninteresting affair. The judges, I could see, were decided against me in advance; my lawyer made a long and vivid harangue which won general applause and could not fail to raise him in the eyes of his profession; and the upshot was that I was condemned to die.

“Yes, I was condemned to die. Shall I tell you which anguish, of the thousand anguishes I endured through those hours of trial, put its head above the rest and bit the sorest? It was to hear people during the brief recesses which occurred two or three times—it was to hear even the warders in the hot, stuffy court-room discussing their plans for that evening, for to-morrow, for next week. All of them were free when the court rose to turn to the right or to the left; I alone must go down into the dark and never return.

“I was taken back to prison and waited for death. I lay in expectation of that numbing of the senses, that sullenness of despair, which I had read of as falling upon prisoners without hope; but my nature refused me such relief. I think I might be as brave as another in any situation calling for courage where the cause was worthy and noble; but before the disgraceful and miserable end which attended me but a few days off, I will not deny that I trembled. You must reflect that my nerve was broken by my isolation, by the absence of any support or pity from outside: even the ruffians who went rollicking to Tyburn had their doxies; *Macheath* had his *Lucy* and *Polly*; but for me there was nobody in the wide land to care, or to say a prayer for my soul. Add to this that I was torn to pieces by paroxysms of powerless raging against the heinousness of this crime the law was committing; by the reflexion that even if it discovered its error after my death it would be scarcely moved, and would certainly profit not at all, but continue to stumble on self-satisfied in its blind way; and that even if the police did one day discover the truth, they would be so afraid of the scandal, of the public indignation, of the dishonour, of the hatred they would arouse, (for a case like mine would strike home to every man’s egoism, since he might himself be the next victim), that they would simply stifle all investigation:—figure to yourselves that these and a thousand other torturing reflexions haunted me

day and night. and you cannot fail to form some kind of dim picture of my state, though far enough from the real thing. I lay in gaol, trodden down and abandoned by mankind, and waited to die.

II

“Well, it is obvious that I did not die, since here I am speaking to you to-night. I was redeemed by one of those extraordinary interpositions which, though they do sometimes happen, yet happen so rarely that they encourage us to believe that the Eternal Being does really glance from time to time at this planet, and puts out His finger occasionally, and negligently stirs the pieces here and there, when the little animals on its surface are planning a deed more than usually abominable and monstrous.

Two days before I was to die, a man-servant of the inn was walking along a by-street when he came upon a bull guided by a drover with the aid of a heavy whip. The bull was tethered from the horn to the fore leg, as is the custom in those parts; but maddened by the hot dust and flies, and the shouts, and the whip, it managed to snap the tether and ran free. The bull found the servant directly in its road, and it gored him fatally. When the servant regained consciousness he was told that his life could not be saved, and thereupon he asked for a priest and gasped out the truth of the mystery at the inn.

“This man had had entire charge of the rooms in which

the farmer and I were lodged. Now upon entering the farmer's room early in the morning to rouse him, he found that the traveller had died in the night. Astonished and confounded, his first thought was to call up the house; but observing a good sum of money on the table his cupidity was excited, and he determined by all means to make it his own. Following his plan, he left the room silently, locked the door, and waited till the house was astir and the lodgers had gone upon their affairs. The farmer was a heavy drinker, and as it was his custom to lie late after a market day, nobody thought it worth while to notice that he was not yet abroad. The servant meantime had determined to make me the scapegoat. Under pretence of brushing my coat whilst I was half asleep, he searched in the pockets, found a fifty-crown note, and substituted for it one from the hoard of the farmer. Then, when he had seen me go out, knowing himself perfectly unwatched, he re-entered the farmer's room, transported the corpse into my room, and there did not hesitate to stab the dead body brutally with a long knife—such a stab as no living man could have survived. Knowing that I would return to the room, he removed, as he thought, all traces of his deed, went downstairs, kept with the others, and observed that the farmer slept late. While I was waiting upstairs for some one to carry down my trunk, he had to be haled from a table where he was drinking a pot with some cronies, and was

sharply reprimanded by the landlord for being out of the house all the morning. Then, when he knew that the train for Munich had left, he remarked generally that he would go up and clean my room, and at the same time cursed the farmer for lying a-bed so late. A minute or two after, he roared out to the house that he had found the farmer murdered under my bed. I don't think that when he did this he saw the results clearly to an end: he told the priest that he thought they would never find me: he was a low type of man, of stunted understanding, and he believed that once a man was out of Salzburg he was in a wilderness where he could never be tracked. When he saw me brought back, he was afraid to open his mouth; and what is more, he was afraid to spend a penny of his ill-gotten money which was all found under a board in his room. Such was his story. He died soon after.

"I was at once set free, with the frigid apologies customary in such cases—without a stain on my character, as the phrase is. What good were their apologies to me? Even for the poor, brutalized, labouring man in like case, whom they think it will help to find work, it doesn't meet the situation; for most people jib at a man who has been in prison though he be declared innocent fifty times over. But for me, sensitive beyond the run of men, with my health ruined, my brain unhinged, physically broken, and morally degraded, with not an ounce of self-respect

left, afraid to look men in the eyes for fear they would read I was a gaol-bird, with in fact all the sneaking manner, half-deprecatory, half-insolent, of the ticket-of-leave man—what could their apologies do to heal my maimed life, to restore to me a sense of dignity, of equality, of freedom? As well may a man in a motor-car apologize and send a bottle of eau-de-Cologne to a youth whose legs he has crushed. I had lain down by the machine; I had done my best to keep free of it, to guard against its strokes; and lo, it had sucked me in as though I had slept.

“I hurried into Italy. I did not dare to change my name for fear they would make that a crime. The terror was upon me; I felt their eyes in every street, in every room; I dreaded that at any moment their claws might be outstretched to drag me into the dungeon. No protection, no justice, was to be looked for. Almost I was afraid to breathe; literally, I was afraid to move out of my room: to walk in the street might by some subtilty be twisted into a crime. At last one day as I was slouching meanly by the side of the pillars under the arcade in Milan, so as to be on the far side away from the shops, something buzzed in my head and I fell down. When next I knew anything I was in an asylum for the crazy.

“There is little more to relate. One of the doctors who visited there was interested in music; he conversed with me frequently; and when they deemed that I was more or less normal and let me go, he

helped to start me anew. He is dead long since. He was as near a friend as I have ever had, and yet—will you believe it?—great as the relief would have been to pour into his ear my doleful history, every time I was tempted to do so, I refrained. Why? Because good as he was, high-minded as he was, yet I was not certain that he was so far removed from the generality of men as to restrain himself from shaking his head and saying, or at least thinking:—It *may* have been a mistake, but still when a man has been in the hands of the police, there must be something, something.—In like manner, I have never mentioned my catastrophe to any man or woman whatever, because, with the best faith in the world, and the firmest intention to guard the secret, still, you know, the facts might just happen to leak out, and then it would be: ‘O yes, what’s-his-name, the composer: he has had rather a stormy life; he was mixed up in a murder case in Austria when he was young.’ No! since I bore the stigmata of the machine, I determined to keep them covered. And yet to-night, at length, I am blabbing it all here at a supper-table. Again you may ask, why. Well, because this is perhaps the most important night of my life, because I am excited, because you are—are you not?—my friends and well-wishers, but chiefly,” added the Master with a sombre smile, “because I am seventy years old, I cannot possibly live much longer, my life is over, and consequently I have nothing left to

fear from the malice and treachery of mankind."

He paused, sipped some wine, and then concluded.

"Many hard words have been broken upon the Anarchists, and no doubt they are in great part deserved. Still, it is necessary to recollect when we give way to our indignation, that the motive of the Anarchist is always noble. The usual imputation of a craving for notoriety is only twaddle invented by the newspapers hard up for invective, and has been discredited long ago. The Anarchist, viewing the transitoriness and discontinuity of man's existence, is sickened by the contemplation of the thousand evils which society has wantonly created to make man suffer with a poignancy so out of proportion to the length of his days. And so, when he flings his bomb, he considers he is advancing the destruction of this nefarious society, and bringing nearer the time when all the old being destroyed and levelled, a better system will have room to arise in the untainted air. In thus reasoning he may possibly be right: personally I do not think so, and I care little. Evils such as the one by which I was crushed have their cause not so much in the usurpation of some and the submission of others, as in the fact that man is what he is, in the constitution of society itself. Whether this will ever alter, and how, is to me of small importance: my concern is with the hopeless position of the individual as opposed to the group,—I care not whether a group of outdoor labourers,

whisking tradesmen, lawyers and doctors, authors and college-professors, merchants and bankers, soldiers and nobles. I have no rose-water notions, I am sure, about the superiority of one class over another; about the superior virtue of the poor and ignorant, or the superior generosity and insight of the rich and educated. I see no reason to believe that what goes by the name of education will ameliorate the former, or that vague slumming and ostentatious charity will make the other more gracious and merciful. All classes are equally formidable to the individual: they will even sink their angers and jealousies to make common cause against him. The only essential difference my experience leads me to draw in this matter is that the lower the class, the more disposed it is to be vindictive and persecuting, because it has stronger desires, and more rancour to get rid of. It is not the rich and educated who follow the poor prisoner through the streets hooting. But all classes without exception supply oil to the machine, and gloat when an individual is sucked in. Considering these things, shall I be forgiven if I say I am so far one with the Anarchist, that if I had thought to-night that by throwing a bomb over there just now among the brilliant audience, I should have dislocated one joint of the machine, and so brought nearer by an hour its utter annihilation, then would I have thrown the bomb, and gladly have suffered death amid the general ruin."

AFTER DINNER

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- Écoute, je vais te dire une chose . . . En Allemagne, si les chiens n'ont pas d'âme, crois-tu que les personnes en aient ?
Je l'embrasse, et à voix basse je lui réponds :
— C'est un peu bête, ce que tu penses là, mais que ce soit un secret entre nous, moi-même, je pense comme toi.

IN a certain commercial town which for convenience I will call Brestford, it is the custom of each of the great trades, the butchers, the grocers, the fish-mongers, and the others, to meet at dinner once a year by way of softening, I suppose, the asperities which the acute rivalry of the year is apt to engender. These dinners are eaten in the principal hotel, a large hotel with a large dining-hall. The functions have a certain importance: they are reported in the local press; the members of Parliament for the borough generally manage to attend one of them,—the butchers' one year, the grocers' another; sometimes even a minister thinks it worth while to come down, if a dissolution is near, or any grave question before the country.

But it happened on the night I was present that there was neither member nor minister. I was present, I must explain, as a spectator, not as an invited guest, and I became a spectator in the most negligent way imaginable. Having arrived at the town in the morning, I had come to the afore-mentioned hotel, where I

proposed to stay for the night. In the hotel, when you are upon the landing of the first floor, you can look down upon a open space,—the hall, in fact, where the dinners proceed. Seated in my room at about half-past-nine of the evening, filled with the gloomy reflections and apprehensions that overwhelm some travellers in the room of an hotel in a strange town, my reverie was broken by the sound of knives rapped on plates, and those other mingled noises which are conveniently summed up by the newspapers as “cheers”. Are there not certain hours (I now asked myself) when even the most horrid noise is more soothing to the senses than silence? And even the most repulsive and depressing sight (I thought) must be less terrible at times than the vision of a man’s self, garbed as it is in anguish, despair, and regret; any voice, the most harsh and discordant, cannot fail to be less painful than the tones of that spectre when they become cruel, menacing, inexorable. From all these very just reflections, let me prefer, (said I, stepping out on the landing) to listen to the grocers.

There were the grocers, sure enough. They had dined, it was plain, and dined well; their attitude said repletion, and oh! so evidently, that they had paid for their dinner and could pay for more. As I considered the heads of all these tradesmen, mostly red, fat, apoplectic, the salient marks appeared in the immense cunning of the little eyes, the deformation

of the mouths, their lubberly way of taking their ease. From the five or six vast tables rose up I don't know what reek of the mean, the ordinary, the ignoble. The great handlers of money, the men who plan and conduct huge financial transactions, often gain from the largeness of the enterprizes in which they are engaged, their enormous responsibilities, the perpetual tension of nerves, a personal distinction and dignity of carriage: "You cannot wield great agencies without lending yourself to them". But the man in a provincial town who has grown rich by small means, whose eyes are constantly on the shillings of others, destroys a faculty in himself which some hold is originally in all men, and makes for high demeanour. These grocers here were indeed mostly prosperous; it was easy to pick out the few relatively unsuccessful traders who had been admitted to the feast. I say, relatively: for if they had been wallowing in the sloughs of failure I am sure the ponderous traders would have strongly objected to their minglement with the good company. These last, then, these relatively unsuccessful brothers, were bestowed in obscure corners, their faces—pale, weazened, fox-like,—becoming flat and obsequious when they were addressed by their gross rivals; with strange beacons, for the observer observing them when they thought themselves unobserved,—lurid beacons of envy and hate flashing at times from their eyes towards the diners at the principal table.

Speeches followed one another, long, tiresome, unsewn, with the repetitions and involutions of those who have not the habit of oratorical precautions. At a side-table, the reporters, with amazing goodwill, feverishly beat their brains to make the incoherences readable. That sort of thing persisted a weary while. Meantime those who had not to speak, or who had already spoken, drank and smoked a good deal. Now the hour of champagne has passed, and they have fallen to whisky and brandy. By degrees their manner of taking their ease is emphasized: a few unbutton their waistcoats.

However, the speeches at length are finished, and after a time the revellers relax themselves with what is called a smoking-concert. The entertainment is provided by a family of foreigners: a man, his son, a lad about twelve, and the mother. Ah, I see her yet, the tall, rhythmical, perilous creature, with grave Italian eyes, singing Schumann in her warm mysterious voice before these gross heads regarding her without perception, with sluggish desire;—have they not paid for her too with their dinner? The position of most poor foreigners domiciled in England is, in truth, deplorable, and cannot but stir the pity of the compassionate. They stand, a lamentable brotherhood, for the insolent suspicion, the patent distrust, for the wet night, the wandering, the sickening furnished lodging,—they stand for all that, against assurance, respectability, comfort, the snug

house of the citizen, the lands of the yeoman. And to-night what are they but contemptible pariahs on suffrance before these grocers at dinner!

The man sang two or three songs with taste and skill. Then the boy stood up and sang with his treble voice, plaintive and charming, indescribably sad. They had dressed him (the detail is rather touching) they had dressed this little exotic in the English fashion, with Eton jacket and collar, as though to deprecate the British repugnance they dreaded for their lonely foreign child. But the child had in effect a success, a success, however, which soon became regrettable. For when the applause had fallen, the president of the feast, moved no doubt by an instinct of good-nature, but with what you may consider a singular lack of delicacy, made an appeal for a subscription towards rewarding the child. He would send round the hat, he said. But the revellers sat with frugality close at their elbow; and this was proved when one announced the meagre sum collected.

Thereupon the president chose to grow warm. With a flushed face and in a thickened voice he lectured and upbraided the guests. He explained that when he condescended to make an appeal among rich men for charity by way of helping some foreign paupers, he took it as an affront if it was not responded to. Having found the note that suited him, in that strain he went on. Listening to him, one thought how he would regret it all in the morning. The Italians, during

this infinitely trying scene for them, veiled their embarrassment under an admirable tranquillity. They had endured so many humiliations, so many martyrdoms, the poor wretches! Then the president pulled himself together for a peroration. He had talked himself into a good humour (one saw easily that he didn't care a farthing really for the subjects of his appeal, but only for his own grandeur), and he ended on a jest. "Why", (he cried) "if you had only put your hands in your pockets like men, that boy might have had an education. He might have become anything. I tell you, he might have become a great man—as great a man as his father".

As great a man as his father! There was a roar of laughter, and the president's fat body shook at his own wit. As great as his father! It was too good!—his father who played the piano for them, the grocers of Brestford, whilst they sat at dinner, and for whose child they had just now dropped their sixpences on a plate. But ere the laughter had quite died away, the foreign man, crying out as if he were suddenly hurt, threw himself forward on a table, and there amid the drooping flowers and the smoke he hid his face in his arms and sobbed. The grocers stared: what was the matter with him? Was he drunk? His wife glided swiftly to his side, put her beautiful white arm upon his shoulder, and with an expression of divine understanding and pity, whispered something in his ear. The grocers stared: they did not understand it.

No; but don't you understand it? When he saw himself thus raised up in ignominy for the jests and scorns of the world, and pointed at ironically as an example to his little frightened son, in one horrid murderous instant he had the complete failure of his life gathered together and presented to him with acute, blinding clearness. The hot tears sprang at the vision, as the hot blood follows a stab. Till then he had had some refuge of hope, he had deluded himself, he had allowed himself to be deluded. And it was not as if he had never hoped, as if he had from the beginning resolutely declined ambition. Rather did he see lying behind him thirty skeleton years; the wreck of his mad dreams of triumph in Milan, Vienna, Paris, surged a sombre resurrection. And the reality? Here he was fallen and lost in a foreign provincial town, dragging out a mean existence by giving lessons, by entertaining while they ate these burgesses ignorant of his art, who despised in him the exterior proclamation of his mischance. Oh yes, he knew the slums, the shameful complaisances, the black hours when his wife and child lacked bread. Gradually his life had degraded like the dolourous crumbling palaces of his native land, once the scene of the glory and masquerades of princes, the pomps of cardinals; with their long, shadowy, neglected gardens—those holy fields, over whose acres erewhile passed the feet of goddesses, now pressed by the rude boots of tourists from all the northern lands.

AT THE REVUE

AT THE REVUE

NOT a review of troops, you understand: we are far enough from that now. Rather, a stage *Revue* in an open-air theatre on a cold lonesome night at the beginning of September, a night when the wind cuts like November, and you hear that strange dull rustle among the trees which precedes the fall of the leaf.

This *Revue*, evidently, is on its last legs. There is plenty of "paper", as the phrase is, in the house. When I enter, a comic singer is bowing his acknowledgment of a faded, languid applause, and wondering, doubtless, whether if this temperature holds he can by any means escape the dregs of his contract. Then the curtain goes down upon him, and people begin to straggle in for the *Revue*.

They seem to be mostly little shop-keepers, little wine merchants, with their wives and daughters furbished up for the occasion. Here and there the head-waiter of some fashionable restaurant, with his fat, dead-white, clean-shaven, unhealthy face, who has got a night free in this slack season, uneasily assuming a grand air, drags after him his submissive family, whom he regards with shame and fury because they are not more like the ladies for whom daily he

adjusts the footstool. All these people look a little timid at finding themselves in a theatre where they would never put a foot if the *Revue* were not, as I say, on its last legs. They exchange discreet handshakes with the waiters and the servants of the theatre: then, observing the listless state of the audience, they become assured, laugh, make large gestures, venture a joke. The servants of the theatre put their friends in good places. One sees where the "paper" comes from.

The band, since the curtain descended on the comic man, has been playing a strident march nervously. The conductor at first beats time with a feverish energy, but as the march proceeds he lets his stick fall heavily upon his knee, still keeping time mechanically with his foot; and then suddenly he awakes with a jump, and falls to beating again in a rage. The march gets to an end with a thundering clash of drums and clappers; somebody on the stage knocks thrice; and the curtain goes up for the *Revue*.

The wind gives a dismal menacing howl, and searches your bones. Really it is time to put on a overcoat. A lady in red tights appears, and while her eyes full of self-pity dwell upon the leader of the orchestra, she sings shrilly, with gestures done too often to be ignored, machine-like actions of long drill, the opening ballad. It is not enough, that, to recall the people from their bitter musings. A stout *Daphnis* bounds on the stage. He at least is not

daunted, he will put some heart into the business. He is dressed with a faint resemblance to the artificial shepherds of the Eighteenth Century; a pipe of Pan is slung by a silken sash across his shoulder, you see him toying on a green bank in the torrid noon-time of July. Oh, the blessed sun! He bounds on the stage, and strikes an attitude, confident of applause. But the applause does not come. Instead, a heavy silence, and that sad rustle in the trees, and far off, so far that it seems from another world, a voice raucous and harsh, clamouring "La Presse, La Presse!" Ah, where that voice sounds are joy, and laughter, and the warm cafés,—yes, and a good hot American grog. The actor glares with his little fat eyes angrily upon the stolid congregation, and then, all his enthusiasm evaporated, he lets himself go, and gabbles incoherently his part.

Hereupon a chorus of girls comes on to support him with a laugh which begins blithely, but turns rather hollow when they feel the influence of this audience;—this audience of which the superiors are ill-humoured, stupified with cold, while the inferiors, who might otherwise be amused, feeling themselves out of place, not at home, think proper to imitate their betters and sternly repress any motions of gaiety; and so the whole house rests impassible, jellied, frozen. The girls search this audience with eyes full of a hope which goes out as quickly as a douche of cold water quenches a flame; and here-

after, disgusted, they wander vaguely about with a heavy salaried sprightliness, shuddering whenever they have to draw from the shelter of the scenery down to the footlights in the track of the wind. By-and-by, when they are standing inactive, they resume vacantly an examination of their legs. What a waste, all the same!

The butterflies who have had the unhappy inspiration to lead their chevaliers of a night from a tepid restaurant, after a good dinner, to this place which would freeze the ardour of Leander, look around them absently, uneasily, with envious eyes upon the few women who have cloaks, and unable at any price to maintain their pleasant empty talk. And suddenly behind me there rises a dialogue which illustrates vividly two different natures:—the nature of the butterfly, the gypsy, the artist, to escape immediately, no matter what the cost, from anything that distresses them or makes them uncomfortable, and the nature of the sound burgess who is resolved to have the worth of his money.

“Suppose we go,” says the butterfly.

But the other flames into a rage. “Go!” he cries, “suppose we go? You don’t seem to realize that I have paid a crazy sum of money for these seats. And then to go before the end! Ah, no, if you please; that would be too childish. You don’t suppose that I throw money into the pockets of the directors of theatres for my amusement, do you?”

"You do it as a penance, perhaps," hazards the butterfly, and sniffs with her dainty nose, which is getting redder and redder, and tries to console herself by contemplating the actresses: she has a skirt to her legs at any rate. While he, staring, sullen, with his teeth chattering, sits on desperately, careless of a cold on the lungs, a cold in the reins, so long as he gets the value of his ten francs.

At this juncture there enters one evidently a foreigner, a large fat man, self-satisfied, aggressive, who disturbs all the world in his passage, and leaves in his wake the scents of the barber's shop—of Portugal water, of crude violet perfume. He is in evening dress, and his shirt is held together by one great stud—a diamond perhaps, or something like a diamond. He has on a straw hat, and a little brown overcoat which reaches just to his hips and leaves visible the tails of his dress-coat; but he is so conscious of his shirt-front and his stud, indicating a man unlike the rest of us here—a man of the elegant world and the purest social instincts, who puts on evening dress to go to an open-air theatre in a foreign capital in September, whereas at home, in the bosom of his family, he would hardly take the trouble to wash his hands before the evening meal;—so eager is he to blind us by his distinguished condition, that he prefers to let the biting wind play about the diamond and seek the recesses of his shirt, rather than button up the little overcoat. A woman is in his company, with beautiful haggard

eyes, and a beautiful, mocking, half-weary mouth,—a face of disillusion, of the disappointed sentimentalist, the ruined idealist. She is tired of her fat man, one sees, and she sends a strange, sifting look through the assistance, searching for somebody—for anybody else. As for him, the fat man, with a fuss and bustle he flops into his seat, and as he looks around with condescension he gradually perceives the pallid languor of his surroundings. He has a glittering ring on his third finger, and passing his hand slowly through his hair, he puts his ring in evidence. But look you! these good actors must be encouraged: after all, they deserve a little applause. And dropping his head on one side he half-closes his eyes, and with an indulgent smile on his thick lips he claps his hands lightly together, murmuring with infinite fatuousness, "Brava, brava!" So gesturing, he flatters himself that he resembles not too remotely the old gentlemen he has seen in the front rows at the Opera discreetly approving a singer who has brought to a triumphant finish some flamboyant trill of Meyerbeer or Verdi. And the woman by his side continues to promenade over the assemblage her eyes, sombre, tarnished, hungry,—always searching, searching . . .

Meanwhile on the stage things have moved a little. We are now, if you please, in a dressmaker's shop in the Rue de la Paix. A lady, accompanied by *Daphnis*, rushes on the stage, and shrieks breathlessly that she wants a costume. The man-tailor, after

spending a moment to sing with an air of spiritless anxiety a love-song to the fore-woman of the establishment, draws a tape from his pocket to measure the customer. The lady proceeds to disrobe, not slowly, but with furious haste—anything to get it over!—and presto! she stands revealed in a pretty enough suit of underclothing.—Gr-r-r-ue! what an icy blast was there! We must turn up our collars—it has come to that! A man in the corner is coughing fit to render up his soul. If such is the wind under an overcoat, what must it be in the skin!

But stay! A *concierge* and his family who sit in front of me are twisting and choking with laughter—actually revelling in the events of the stage. They have left a neighbour this night to pull the string, and having come out for enjoyment they mean to have it, wet or dry. They alone appreciate the political jokes, the dreary taunts at the police, at the existing government, at Monseigneur le duc d'Orleans,—the abstruse gibes which nobody but writers of *Revue*s any longer thinks interesting or actual; perhaps they alone understand them. Not for nothing have they spent long hours in silent deserted quarters, in the depths of their *loges*, reading the passionate proses of partisan journalists.

Then suddenly there glides on the stage a magnificent apparition—beaming, light-footed, glorious: 'tis *Venus*! How *Venus* has been brought with any shew of likelihood to the dressmaker's shop, nobody

knows, nobody much cares—except perhaps the *concierge* and his family. However, there she is, easy, tall, with flowing red hair, laughing—not from the end of her lips, but with all her heart. The mere sight of her has stirred the torpid audience to an undecided state of well-being, which if prolonged might end in good humour. She does not shirk the wind, this one; on the contrary, she stands in the most fragile raiment on the corner of the stage where the draughts are sharpest, and lets the wind deal with her, get into her hair, her eyes, while she laughs—what a laugh!—in its teeth, and stretches out her arms to welcome it with a superb gesture, the splendid girl! Ah, in what gutter of Batignolles has her body been tempered to the iron wind; in what gutter or alley of the Rue des Martyrs has she learned to despise the rudeness of storms!

But *Venus*, with the best intentions in the world, cannot remain on the stage all night. Even now she vanishes, and the wind sweeps through the theatre, actually stripping the trees, and driving the dead leaves against our faces. And that—was that a raindrop on my hand?—Yes, and then another—and another. Human endurance can no more. The wind and weather have worn down the resistance of daily clothes: there is only left the refuge of the bedclothes.



